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Bodies In Play: Female Athleticism In Nineteenth-Century Literature

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BODIES IN PLAY: FEMALE ATHLETICISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores depictions of athletic female characters in nineteenth-century American literature. I argue that there is a rich literary tradition of athletic women, whose origin I date to the 1840s, that has not been explored. To date, scholars have considered athletic women in literature anomalies, a case of a gender-bending female found in a single text, but not part of a longer genealogy of this character type. By examining athletic women over a period of decades and across several genres of American literature we see how this character type has been shaped by authors and culture alike. I illustrate how authors fashioned a character type that reflected the racial, political, and cultural moment in which he or she was writing. Simultaneously, athletic female embodiment reveals how texts themselves change when physical performance culture enters narratives.

Athletic women, historically and in fiction, are linked to the theater and performance. Because athletic women were not taken seriously for their skills, they were looked at as simply entertainment; their sports were often relegated to theatrical spaces, such as stages during play intermissions. Authors recognized this connection between athletics and performance and utilized it to draw attention to the performativity of gender on the part of the female athlete. Athletic characters change their embodied performances based on context and audience, showing how women appropriated cultural scripts through sport. Ultimately, in nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, play-acting and athleticism become entwined and athleticism becomes a method for self-invention.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1883, the *New York Times* published "Miss Harris's Base-Ball Nine," about an exhibition between two black female baseball teams in the Northeastern United States. It reads:

> A reporter of the Philadelphia *Times* to-day found a number of persons, white and black, lounging under the maples in the Lamokin Woods, when suddenly a dusky damsel, with a red and white jockey cap stuck upon her head, a short, tight-fitting pink and white sheeny calico dress enveloping her form, and a pair of cricket shoes on her feet, suddenly emerged upon the scene. ("Miss Harris").

The woman described here, Ella Harris, is the captain of the Dolly Vardens No. 1 baseball team.[1] Immediately, the reader's attention is directed towards Ella's feminine body, as the reporter notes that she has a "ribbon suspended on [her] bosom." She wears a short, tight dress that further accentuates her female form. However, she also carries "a base-ball bat over her right shoulder and she [strides] over the greensward with manly strides." She then "shoulder[s] her bat" and "stalk[s] down through the maple glade." While Ella's movements are assertive and aligned with manliness, her clothing is "stuck upon her head" and "envelops" her ("Miss Harris"). The language used to describe her costume renders Ella submissive at the same time that her body is depicted as forceful.

[1] Debra A. Shattuck gives a brief history of the Dolly Varden No. 1 and the Dolly Varden No. 2 teams in *Bloomer Girls: Women Baseball Pioneers*. See Chapter Four of *Bloomer Girls* for more background.

With nearly every action that she takes, Ella seems to combine femininity and masculinity in the way that she holds herself. As the article continues, it becomes clear that Ella Harris takes command of the gaze directed towards her by both onlookers and teammates. She also maintains steady control over the space of the field throughout the article. When Ella "[emerges] on the scene" she becomes the object of everybody's attention, much like an actor walking onto a stage and captivating an audience. A "poorly dressed young colored woman" shouts, "Foh de Lord's sake, am dat you, Ella Harris?" Ella ignores the question, refusing to either confirm or deny her identity, and monologues in a "long, theatrical aside" about the tardiness of the Dolly Vardens No. 2 team ("Miss Harris"). Then, to prepare for the game, Ella directs her players to stand in specific places and she cordons off space, using rope and the players' bodies to mark the field. She sets the stage for the performance that is about to take place.

Ella's form-fitting Dolly Vardens costume, which already juxtaposes her female frame with her masculine comportment, also carries race and class implications. Not only does her jockey cap recall the tradition of black men, often former slaves, serving as jockeys in the nineteenth century, but the tight-fitting "pink and white sheeny…dress"[2] mirrors a fashion trend from the 1870s—the Dolly Varden dress, so named for the white, upper-class, flirtatious woman in Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1841).[3] In other words, the way that Ella chooses to outfit herself puts the contradictions of her identity on display. Her uniform, coupled with her theatrical asides, create a dynamic version of Ella Harris that is difficult to pin down.

[2] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, sheeny refers to something "having a bright, shiny surface" and was first used in the seventeenth century ("sheeny, adj").
[3] For more information on the Dolly Varden dress see *The Metropolitan Museum of Art: The United States of America* (1987), pg. 90.

In fact, Ella is literally moving throughout the article, walking off the field and to the train station. She moves between different geographic spaces—the woods, the train station, and the baseball field. In each space, Ella interacts with different kinds of people—white and black, onlookers and participants, and players from both Chester and Philadelphia. As she negotiates those interactions, Ella repurposes the spaces that she occupies. What begins as an open field quickly becomes a baseball diamond as Ella marks the ground with ropes and "place[s] her men," telling them where to stand on the field. Then, while the team waits for their opponents to arrive, the players remake the space for jumping rope. The "nine unbent themselves and hopped over the rope" with vigor ("Miss Harris"). Ella claims dominance over the field, understanding that her athleticism affords her more opportunities to traverse and repurpose these spaces than the game's onlookers have; instead, they sit in the shade, expressing hesitation to enter the playing field space.

Ella's commanding performance and the Dolly Vardens' athleticism, perhaps unsurprisingly, evoke negative responses, illustrating unease about the transgressive nature of sportswomen in the nineteenth century, and in this case black sportswomen. Most obviously, the reporter "employs racist slang to represent players' speech patterns" (Shattuck 117). The reporter also uses racist imagery, writing that the players "amused themselves by pitching the ball at each other. One lady got hit in the upper lip, but it did not seem to swell any bigger than it was before" ("Miss Harris"). Many onlookers at the game responded disapprovingly to the players' bodies. At the same time that the Dolly Varden No. 1 players are sexualized by some male onlookers, who are "delighted" by the vigor with which the women jumped rope, others are more contemptuous in their

responses. For instance, one woman notes that "'If I was a man and had my girl gwine foolin' and monkeyin' like dem I would hab nuffin to do wid her'" ("Miss Harris"). What this article makes clear is that Americans were not entirely comfortable with the idea of an athletic woman in the nineteenth century, and discourse on female embodiment is rife with racist and sexist arguments that denigrate them.

I refer to "Miss Harris's Nine" because it serves as a snapshot of the ways that female athleticism functioned in the nineteenth-century United States, and what's more, it represents the ways that athleticism is closely linked to performance. As Debra Shattuck notes, the Dolly Vardens were playing at a time when "spectators craved novelty" (Shattuck 117). In fact, most early female baseball teams "were theatrical productions…staged with costumes and circus-like spectacle" (Shattuck 72). The blurring of women's athletics and entertainment in the nineteenth century was not exclusive to baseball, either. Rather, this unsettling of clear demarcations between athletes and performers was common. In my dissertation I examine newspaper articles like "Miss Harris's Nine," alongside stories and novels from the long nineteenth century, to make sense of the intersection of performance culture, athleticism, gender subversion, and racial categorization.

My dissertation, "Bodies in Play: Female Athleticism in Nineteenth-Century Literature," explores historical and fictional representations of nineteenth-century female athletes that have been previously overlooked, much like "Miss Harris's Nine." Today, when critics mention athletic women in fiction they tend to represent them as anomalies, gender-bending females found in that single text, but not part of a longer genealogy of

this character type.[4] I instead follow the cultural trope of the athletic woman, whose origin I date to the 1840s and which I trace through the 1920s. This character resists static gender categorization as either masculine deviant or feminine mother, but also fends off pejorative racialization, the imputation of excess embodiment assigned to women of color. Given this aspiration to whiteness and anxiety about corporeality, it is little surprise that this figure becomes entwined with nativist views by the end of the long nineteenth century. Athletic women, marginalized in the mid-nineteenth century, employed their athleticism and its associations with performance culture as cultural capital, using their athletic bodies to navigate formerly inaccessible spaces. However, as the nineteenth century progresses, literary genres like domestic fiction and the College Girl novel illuminate the limits of athletic performance for characters who do not adhere to heteronormative values or who are not part of the white middle-class.

The cultural figure of the athletic woman in the nineteenth century is one whose athleticism is not simply about physical exertion. That is certainly a large part of her athleticism, and I use the term "athletic" to refer to physical feats that involve some combination of speed, endurance, strength, agility, and dexterity. But in addition to physical exertion, in my project I consider the ways that publicness is often a precondition for athletic performance. The athletic woman understood how to perform for different audiences, costume herself, and contort her body in various ways depending on the situation. The performative aspect of athleticism and its constantly shifting nature are precisely what make it difficult to pin down one stable definition of the athletic woman in

[4] For further reading on women athletes in literature see Michelle Abate's *Tomboys: A Cultural History*; Ellen Gruber Garvey's *The Adman in the Parlor*; Marth Patterson's *Beyond the Gibson Girl*; Michael Oriard's "From Jane Allen to Water Dancer: A Brief History of the Feminist (?) Sports Novel"; Alison Piepmeier's *Out in Public*; Patricia Marks's *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*; Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization*.

the nineteenth century. That inability to ascribe a single fixed meaning to the athletic woman opens up new ways to consider athletic female characters within the context of nineteenth-century literature. It also means that no two examples of athleticism that I discuss throughout this dissertation will exactly resemble one another. At times I discuss the physicality of boxing in the 1840s, at other times I consider identity performance and costumery of cyclists, and still at other times I think through the goals of community building through sport. All are athletic performances, but all also encompass a public performance of some sort.

My title, "Bodies in Play," draws attention to the coextensivity of athletics and performance culture in the nineteenth century, a relationship that allows the women characters in my study, as Ella Harris does in the anecdote above, to highlight their own theatricality and their traversal of public space and identity categories. Theater was a purveyor of popular culture, including athletics, in the United States, and there was a permeable line between athletic exertion and professional performance. Early women's baseball games featured interruptions for performances (Shattuck 72). Female boxers, closely linked to vaudeville performances, held matches during intermissions at plays. These matches took place on stage, with a set assembled and props placed around the theatre (Pfister and Gems 1000).[5] Additionally, actresses exercised and underwent physical training before taking the stage and literary characters learned sports to put on more "authentic" plays. Figures like Annie Oakley reenacted their athletic feats on stage (Kasper 23-24). The list goes on.

[5] Photographs of the Bennett Sisters, boxers and wrestlers who performed on stage in the middle of vaudeville acts during the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, are available through the Library of Congress at https://www.loc.gov/item/2014692239/ as examples of later versions of these stage matches.

Culturally, athletic women were considered performers, not athletes. As "Miss Harris's Nine" illustrates, "the myth undergirding their [female baseball players] narrative was that blacks and women were baseball novices who could offer spectators only comic relief, not serious athletic competition" (Shattuck 117). Women's athletic bodies were not often taken seriously as capable of skilled recreational activities outside of a theatrical setting. Instead, outside the theater, women's bodies were typically assessed according to a binary: either dainty and feminine or hardened and masculinized by labor, depending on their class status and race. While relegating athletic women to theatrical spaces seems to make them freakish, their bodily presentations in these spaces actually provide them a degree of agency. Performance spaces, heterotopias of sorts, let audiences revel in the spectacularity of the body while also giving female athletes the space to let their bodies be unruly and multivalent. These two seemingly incompatible realities—the gaze on the athletic woman and the athletic woman's expanding behavioral options—coexist in one temporary space (Foucault 354). "Play with an unruly woman," Natalie Davis writes, "is partly a chance for temporary release from the tradition and stable hierarchy; but it is also part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power within society" (qtd. in Russo 131). The performing female body, in other words, is in flux and constantly working to upset (and at times to uphold) hierarchical orders through her athletic displays, moving in and out of spaces typically deemed masculine or exotic.

At a time when women were expected to hold and carry their bodies in particular ways, athleticism offered them an alternative mode of being. The close links between female athleticism and theater led to something that I refer to as athletic performativity.

In theatrical spaces, athletic female identities were in flux because they were constantly performed, reinterpreted, and rewritten. Perhaps because of this in-fluxness, athletic women did not necessarily internalize cultural norms about their bodily comportment. Instead, athletic women began to recognize that the control over their bodies their athleticism afforded them, as well as their knowledge of physical culture worlds, allowed women to perform certain identities. For example, Ella Harris's fluctuating gender identity—the way that she holds her body to evoke both masculinity and femininity—allowed her to authoritatively command her teammates *and* fill some of the female onlookers with the desire to "jine them girls and play wid 'em" because they were "jes lovely" ("Miss Harris"). Women appropriated cultural scripts and used that appropriation as a form of cultural capital, a means to temporarily sidestep certain cultural barriers.

Sara Ahmed's theory of orientation is useful here to think about how athletic women navigated cultural scripts. She talks about orientation and the difficult experience of walking into a strange room. However, "our intimacy with rooms, even dark ones, can allow us to navigate our way. We might reach out and feel a wall. That we know how a wall feels, or even what it does…makes the dark room already familiar" (*Queerness* 7). Athletics provide women that sense of familiarity, enabling them to enter those rooms more easily. Their abilities to converse about sport, partake in athletics, or reshape their athletic bodies allows them to navigate those dark rooms that they would otherwise be unable to enter. For instance, Jo March uses her knowledge of equestrianism to infiltrate conversation at a ball with an upper-class crowd; Capitola Black renders her typically kinetic body still to trick a sexual predator and then flies into motion and rides away on horseback at the most opportune moment; Tommy Shirley utilizes sport to bridge the

cultural gap between her friends in the East and the West. Athletic performativity, then, is an assumption or subversion of an athletic persona that women used as a form of agency. They adapt a pre-existing script that they are already familiar with from men's roles and make it advantageous for themselves. This performing allowed women to cross racial divides, class lines, social boundaries, and geographic borders in ways that would have otherwise been unavailable to them. As they cross these boundaries, women shape the new spaces they inhabit; their inhabitance makes it familiar. "The work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar," and athletic performativity allows for that negotiation to happen (*Queerness* 9).

However, the limits and restraints of athletic performativity become apparent in nineteenth and twentieth century literature, as lower-class and non-white characters are unable to achieve the same mobility and access as middle-and-upper-class white women. Race and class inevitably play a role in the movement that female athletes are able to attain in literature, and in each chapter, I consider how the intersections of race, class, and gender shape the discourse about female athleticism. For example, lower-class, Irish prostitutes are racially aligned with African American prostitutes in the flash weeklies through both language and space. Several articles describe Irish women boxing in African American churchyards and then later use the term "gingerbread" to refer to Irishness—a word that also subtly links that Irishness to blackness. These women are received differently, and more negatively, —by other women within the community of prostitutes, by editors of the papers, and by readers—than well-to-do madams of white, European ancestry. Similarly, Pauline Hopkins's Ophelia Davis ends her cycling endeavors in a crash, having been unable to successfully ride anywhere outside of the

kitchen space. Her attempts to present a middle-class identity in public through cycling fail and she and her companion end up in a pile of white sand, evoking images of minstrel shows in this scene. In other words, using intersectionality to examine literature about athletic women makes clear the limits of the performing female body.

The limits to athletic performativity that women of color confront demonstrate the ways that athletics were used as an instrument for enfranchisement in the long nineteenth century. Athletics become a way to train—and exclude—women to be ideal citizens within region and nation. As James Salazar notes, the muscular body signified the "dehumanizing corporeality" of working classes and racial minorities for much of the nineteenth century. However, towards the end of the century, "the muscular body emerged as a powerful new signifier for the 'fitness' of a racialized national character…[a body] empowered to withstand not only the enervating demands of modernity but also the 'race-diluting' effects of massive immigration" (117). Athletics, because they provide women with a space to perform and embody multiple identities, give the impression of offering a number of productive possibilities for engagement with national identity and citizenship in the mid-nineteenth century. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the woman-citizen ideal achieved if only contingently or transiently through athleticism is quite exclusionary. For instance, in the College Girl novel, basketball is premised as democratic, and the girls who engage in the sport discuss how it trains them to be morally-upstanding members of a community. However, in these stories it soon becomes clear that women of color cannot access athletic spaces, like the gymnasium, in any role other than mascot, erasing any possibility of them achieving that woman-citizen ideal. Women deemed lower-class, less respectable, or non-white

represent the limits of athleticism as citizen-making. Throughout the literature that I examine in this dissertation, female athletes push boundaries and use their athleticism to carve out spaces of belonging and American identity; Jane Allen and her friends, for instance, play basketball so they might belong to a community that models virtuous and respectable behaviors to the larger student body at Wellington College. Yet, the avenues of movement available to them as white, middle-class women are not available to most other marginalized characters in the same ways.

Scholarship

In the following chapters I am influenced by foundational texts from the 1980s and 1990s that contextualize how athletic women were spoken about in nineteenth-century America. For centuries, people have attempted to define, quantify, and direct athletic female bodies through the lens of biology, health, and medicine. Groundbreaking sports historians like Martha Verbugge, Jan Todd, Patricia Vertinksy, Jennifer Hargreaves, Susan Cayleff, and Linda Borish, have published extensively about the shift in attitudes towards women's physical fitness throughout the 1800s. While current scholarship on athletic women in literature remains scarce, a small number of scholars are slowly beginning to explore the wide-reaching implications that athletic women in print culture have on questions of politics, race, class, gender, and theater, to name a few affected areas.[6] The athletic body is scripted and influenced by, responds to, and is molded in periodical and literary culture, as were contemporaneous viewers' understandings of the athletic woman's body. By analyzing written accounts of female athleticism, I find both that the female athlete is an authorizing fiction, allowing writers

[6] For more on athletic embodiment and literature, see Martha Patterson's *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, James Salazar's *Bodies of Reform*, Michelle Abate's *Tomboys: A Cultural History*, and Alison Piepmeier's *Out in Public*.

like Louisa May Alcott and Fanny Bullock Workman to claim the body as a site of feminine power rather than vulnerability, but also that many texts, like the flash papers and even Alcott's own sentimental sequels to *Little Women*, discipline and contain the performing female body that seems unruly in non-textual spaces. However, as Sara Ahmed notes, "the concept of 'orientation' allows us to rethink…how space is dependent on bodily inhabitance" (*Queerness* 6). Discipline of the performing woman by authors and other characters is not wholly successful because once the athletic woman is taken up in print culture, she reorients space and her reception makes room for the acknowledgment of her body in flux.

Frances B. Cogan and Alison Piepmeier address literature and physical culture through a feminist lens, and they provide a blueprint on which I model my interdisciplinary work. Cogan's *All American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* introduces the Ideal of Real Womanhood, an alternative to the fragile maiden so closely associated with the popular Cult of True Womanhood in the nineteenth century.[7] She proposes that "more than one popular ideal for middle-class American women existed and was embraced between 1840 and 1880" (9). Cogan focuses primarily on physical culture—diet, light exercise, living conditions—not sport or athletics, but her recuperation of a counter-narrative to True Womanhood supports my contention that the athletic woman was not a marginal or an aberrant figure in the latter half of the nineteenth century but a hotly contested focus of cultural debate. Cogan acknowledges that arguments for both Victorian ideals and a thriving physical culture even became intertwined at times — some of the same arguments used to defend

[7] For more on the Cult of True Womanhood see Barbara Welter's 1966 article in *American Quarterly*, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860".

the Cult of True Womanhood were adopted and used to make a case for why women should maintain their health and physical activity (34). Like Cogan, I am interested in illuminating the counternarrative to that of the nineteenth-century athletic woman as a deviant and masculine freak. Within print culture, the athletic woman saw her body marshalled into static categories in an attempt to subdue and regulate her. However, I posit that this disciplinary action had an inadvertent effect: the embrace of athletic women in print culture opened up new spaces for their performance and play.

Alison Piepmeier also uncovers the importance of physically fit women in the public life of the nineteenth century. In *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America*, Piepmeier focuses on cultural attitudes in periodicals towards women's fitness. In her discussion of Sarah Josepha Hale, Piepmeier posits that often periodicals and the materiality of publications come to stand in for women's moving bodies. Print stands in as a bodily surrogate and print culture becomes "a site which offers not erasure of the body but a complicated public embodiment for the women who exist there" (18). For her, print culture is a space that allows multivalent embodiments and increased mobility for women. Piepmeier notes that "women can utilize the material world of the printed page and the publishing marketplace to stand for—and to travel for and speak for—their bodies" (18). Literature about the athletic woman, her movement through that text, and that circulation of the text itself "help to provide a vocabulary for all these women's discursive constructions of their own bodies" (Piepmeier 18).

I build on this insight in my project, which begins with the penny press and ends with popular College Girl novels. Popular print culture, I suggest, had a particular stake

in the performing, athletic woman. Though these texts often restricted or disciplined her movements, her scandalous body also sold papers—and later, novels. Authors like Louisa May Alcott were able to embody multiple personae and move across genres in their writing. Alcott's characters, through their athleticism, navigate various social settings by adapting the way they carry and display their muscular and strong bodies. Then, the publications themselves traversed multiple spaces and regions, as the print copies of Alcott's newspaper stories and novels circulated to homes by train and canal boat.

Piepmeier also points out the close connections between performance, writing, and corporeality in her discussion of Anna Cora Mowatt, a nineteenth-century theater performer and author. Piepmeier notes that Mowatt was fascinated by the physicality and fitness of theater performers, and she herself lifted weights to prepare her body to go on stage. Rather than striving for a daintiness in a space where she was the object of the male gaze, Mowatt desired to enlarge her muscles, something which was often at odds with femininity in the nineteenth century. Mowatt describes the work she does to ensure that she has a powerful body because she is aware that "in distinction to the submissive true womanly body, the sensational female body must be athletic in order to endure the kinds of demands placed on it, from dangerous travel to violent attacks" (Piepmeier 37). Piepmeier examines Mowatt's polyvocal voice in her autobiography and parses out the ways that Mowatt combines and navigates both the sentimental and the sensational (38). Mowatt understood the oppositional categories that female embodiment often conjured—public versus private, feminine versus masculine, spectacularized versus constrained—and attempted to complicate those dichotomies in both her writing and her stage performances. What Mowatt understands and does—shaping the way her athletic body

was read on the stage as well as in her autobiography—is precisely what I see happening more widely in the long nineteenth century when athletic women are featured in print culture. Though the penny press was written by men and for men, it is striking to me how often narratives about athletic women are also written by women. When Piepmeier proposes that Mowatt was mediating her own body through autobiographical writings, she provides an entrance-point for me to understand the close relationship between women's authorship and women's athleticism.

Cogan and Piepmeier each use feminist theory and historiography to interrogate the female body in the public eye. Michelle Abate's research reminds us that this female body often participates in a developmental narrative where girls move from boyishness to appropriate womanliness, a transition that frequently involves abandoning athleticism. In *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*, Abate claims that while tomboys seem to transgress gender roles through their athletic bodies, that is not necessarily the case. Instead, Abate sees literary tomboys as often reifying traditional notions of middle-class, white womanhood; tomboyism was regarded as simply a phase that developed the strength and health for white, middle-class women to rear children. However, Abate notes that most tomboys grow out of their athletic adventures and end up married with children by the end of their stories (xii). Abate's study informs much of my second chapter, which considers how tomboys' athleticism is affected in both E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* as they mature out of adolescence. Athletic tomboys, as the begin to push the bounds of white heteronormativity, cannot remain in certain genres, like domestic fiction; however, in

sensational stories, which are meant to be less instructive or didactic, tomboys are able to remain active, challenging racial and gender norms through their athleticism.

To better understand the disciplinary function of athleticism as citizenship training, I turn to Salazar's *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America*, an examination of the ways in which character-building and corporeality go hand-in-hand in numerous Progressive Era writings. The "rhetoric of character" is intertwined with nationalist discourse and embodiment for Salazar, ideas upon which I draw for my final chapter on nationalism and sport. I use his work as a model for addressing the ways that athletics both reify and push against the reach of power, and how those actions are made legible within the public sphere. Salazar deftly attends to "the ways that the rhetoric of character provides a site for the extension and operation of power but also for exceeding, undoing, or challenging the reach of power" (12). By the end of the long nineteenth century, athletics were posed as egalitarian, character-building activities, particularly for the college-age women who participated in them. However, College Girl series like *Jane Allen* and *Grace Harlowe* reveal that despite being touted as morally-instructive, women's athletics were closely linked with nativism and only made space in the gym for certain types of bodies.

Project Overview

My dissertation closely considers the interplay between female athleticism, genre, performance, and space. Many of the authors that I examine in this dissertation are women writers, not by intention but by default. During my research I found that far fewer male authors wrote about athletic women in their texts, particularly in the genres within which I work. My project focuses on sentimental, sensational, regional, and college

literature, genres that feature a large number of women writers who describe transgressive athletic female characters. If men wrote within these genres, they often did so under pseudonyms, as these were considered more "feminine" fields. Writing in the nineteenth century marked women authors' bodies; critics commented on the ways that writing built up women writers' strong muscles and declared that writing turned them into literary Amazons. As Ahmed says, "when women write, when they take up space as writers, their bodies in turn acquire new shapes" (*Queerness* 61). If female athleticism provided women the agency to traverse boundaries, I posit that women writers felt marking their own bodies as athletic through authorship would also provide them an athletic performativity, giving them new shape.

I have organized my dissertation into four chapters. Each chapter considers a genre—racy newspapers, domestic fiction, sensational stories, regional literature, and College Girl novels—and the setting that that genre is supposed to map—urban spaces, the home space, the East and the West, universities, and athletic fields; I am interested in how the female body moves through that setting, particularly in performing athleticism. These chapters span roughly eighty years, beginning with newspapers from the 1840s and ending with College Girl novels in the 1920s. I stop my discussion with the 1920s because after this time the landscape of athletics begins to change. At this point, physical education was becoming law; the United States, concerned by the high number of failed army physicals, made physical education classes mandatory across the country (Cahn 57). Women's teams professionalized in growing numbers, and, athletics became a commercial venture in ways that they were not for women prior to the 1920s. The institutionalization of athletics tempered the dynamics of the performing female body that

I trace in my project; the liminality that women's athletics had once occupied, which provided athletic women the space to perform, shrunk when sport was formalized and subject to oversight.

In each chapter of this dissertation, I deal with a different type of literature, and I consider how athletic women are treated differently across genres. In some genres, like sensation stories, athleticism is a source of pleasure and power. In others, like the College Girl novel and domestic fiction, bodily performance is ultimately controlled and restricted so that athletic women can assert their heteronormative whiteness. The intended audience of the genre—whether it be a counterpublic, a mainstream reading public, a lower-class audience, or an upper-class audience—largely determined how female athleticism was handled in that fiction. Moralizing genres like domestic fiction cannot allow women to remain athletic at story's end because that athleticism is seen as a threat to white, heteronormative marriage. Jo March's character in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* suffers this fate and ends the novel stationary, holding a baby. By the twentieth century, didactic fiction like the College Girl novel no longer ends with the loss of women's athleticism, but it does still highlight the ways that athletics reify white Americanness. Jane Allen, for instance, asserts that athletics and egalitarianism are closely linked, but when women of color enter athletic spaces with Jane, they only serve to magnify Jane's own white Americanness. On the other hand, genres such as sensational newspapers and regional literature encourage female athleticism and provide a greater space for women to use their athleticism as a tool for identity performance and a way to accrue cultural capital. These genres put forth an image of the athletic woman as a code switcher. Southworth's Capitola Black, for example, uses different language

registers, costumes that disguise both her class and gender, and a knowledge of athletics to navigate different situations and prevent violence from being enacted on her body. Readers are meant to admire Capitola's athletic abilities and the opportunities that they afford her to code switch.

In the following chapters I address several kinds of spaces: The flash press depicts city scenes, domestic fiction enters the home, regional literature shows women cycling out of doors and across geographic regions, and the College Girl novel shows campus gymnasiums and athletic fields. The physical spaces that female athletes traverse affect how each of their bodies is read, and the women in turn repurpose the spaces as they move across them. Ahmed notes that many spaces take the shape of the bodies that occupy them, "naturalizing" them and aligning them with certain gender identities. If a male author sits at a table and writes every day, for instance, then that table becomes linked "to a specific kind of body"—the male body in this case (*Queerness* 58-59). I argue that athletic women are able to penetrate typically masculine spaces and begin to reorient them. For instance, flash weeklies describe prostitutes in New York City improvising boxing rings, creating a space in which the social and bodily order is upset. Within these rings, athletic women assert a female masculinity that is celebrated by their broader prostitute community. Similarly, in regional literature athletic women become code switchers, changing the ways that they carry their bodies, perform their athleticism, and interact with people in different locations, sometimes to better fit in, sometimes to assert their superiority. The bicycle, for example, provides women in regional literature a mechanism for movement across geographic and cultural boundaries; characters like Tommy Shirley and Ophelia Davis perform their roles differently in the East and the

West, in public and private. However, the limits to this spatial repurposing become clear within each genre and the degree to which women are able to perform their athleticism across boundaries depends largely on their race and class. As athletics are used more often and more explicitly as a vehicle for white, feminine superiority and a mechanism for enfranchisement, who can traverse boundaries through athletics—and importantly, who cannot—becomes evident, either through athletic failures or barred entrance from spaces like the gymnasium.

Chapter Outlines

My second chapter, "Off Went Bonnet and Skirt:" Boxing and Prostitution in the Flash Press," begins with a discussion of articles about boxers in the flash weekly papers of the 1840s. These articles describe boxing matches between prostitutes and the crowds that watch them. Historians locate the entrance of women into boxing in the late-1870s with the match between Nell Saunders and Rose Harland; however, women—prostitutes specifically—were boxing throughout the 1840s. Accounts in racy newspapers (*The Sporting Whip*, *The Flash*, *The Rake*) complicate public discussions about gendered embodiment and liminal spaces female boxers occupied due to their profession and athletic displays. They both depict a space—the boxing ring—in which neither female athleticism nor female sexuality are wholly condemned and illustrate the anxiety that stems from that carnivalesque space. In this chapter I argue that this character type—the athletic female—first appears with regularity in the flash weeklies and sporting papers of the 1840s. Flash weeklies were published extensively for a short period of time and were meant to entertain sporting men about the erotic entertainment that New York had to offer. These papers, in many ways long brothel guides, were "[d]istinguished by a

trenchant, mocking humor and a titillating brew of gossip about prostitutes, theatrical denizens, and sports contests" (Cohen et al. 1). These weeklies served as models for young men "navigating the new world of unrestricted pleasure and commercialized leisure in the city" (Cohen et al. 1).

One particularly common feature of the flash press is the article depicting prostitutes boxing one another. In the flash weekly articles, fighting temporarily upsets the social and bodily order in the flash weeklies. Articles appearing in the flash press about prostitutes engaged in boxing matches introduce readers to a form of athletic female masculinity that resists containment. In the ring, prostitutes are physically assertive and their muscular bodies are revered in that space more than they are outside of it. They sometimes fight the men with whom they are sexually engaged—and usually, they win. The women engaged in these matches do not remain passive, and in fact, domination in the ring is seen as a way to assert sexual prowess and to tote one's sexual endurance—qualities that the women benefit from financially. But, prostitute sex outside of the ring reasserts social order. The editors of the flash press, though initially tolerant of female boxing, at least when the prostitute is white, deride prostitutes in non-boxing articles. They mock female pugilists' bodies, remind readers of the bodily threats prostitutes faced outside of the ring, sometimes even goading violence against certain women, and ridicule women about the men with whom they engage. This disparagement reveals an anxiety concerning the blurring of gender identifications that happened between the ropes. Ultimately, pugilism articles reveal just as much about the fear of unclear boundaries in the flash press—public and private, masculine and feminine—as they do about the embodiment of athletic women during the nineteenth century.

In my third chapter, "Bluestockings, Tomboys, and Literary Amazons in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," I focus on athletic tomboys in both domestic and sensational fiction. Many texts were published in the mid-nineteenth century that champion young, athletic women, such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*. These young women—tomboys—are constantly taking part in athletic activities, but their athleticism is treated differently across genres. Southworth's Capitola Black, the heroine of the sensational *Hidden Hand*, is an athletic tomboy who is allowed to go on adventures, marry, and retain her athleticism at the novel's end. Southworth's influence on Alcott's characterization of Jo March is apparent in the young girl's attempts at writing sensational stories, but Alcott's character does not completely mirror Capitola because of the class aspiration embedded in domestic fiction. In fact, Alcott dramatizes this journey from sensational to domestic fiction in the plot of her novel. When Jo writes sensational stories she is quite athletic, and the act of writing is one that renders her body constantly in motion. As her literary focus turns to moralizing tales, her connection to athletics changes and her self-display as a physically active woman must be evacuated from the novel. By the end of *Little Women*, after her marriage to Professor Bhaer, Jo stands still and holds a baby, while her husband and Laurie join their children in sport. In a domestic novel that is meant to model middle-class, white, heteronormative marriage to its readers, Jo March cannot remain athletic. Female athleticism is a threat to white heteronormativity, as it is often associated with masculinity or lesbianism. In a genre such as sensational literature, which is neither realistic nor didactic in the way that domestic fiction is, female athleticism has more room to exist.

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, regional literature peaked in popularity, and my fourth chapter examines this literature and the athletic female cyclists that populate it. Regional literature typically took the form of short sketches that focused on a specific locale. In Chapter Four, "'The Steed that Never Tires': Regionalism and Rupture in Cycling Narratives," I focus on the ways that female athletes recognized and utilized porousness within regional literature to shape their identities. As physically active women traverse various boundaries in regional sketches, they assume transregional identities, which provide them a degree of agency that they are typically otherwise unable to attain. They defy gender norms and cross different class and racial structures as they pass through various neighborhoods. Cycling provides women with a means to escape a sort of fixity of identity, and when female cyclists recognize this, they begin to use it to their advantage. The first portion of the chapter centers on Willa Cather's story "Tommy," and the ways in which Tommy performs her athletic identity differently when she is in the East versus the West. I then move to a discussion of Fanny Bullock Workman's cycling narratives in an effort to show how athletic performativity and cycling can be used as a vehicle to consolidate white, feminine superiority. Finally, I close the chapter with an examination of Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*, which illustrates the ways that women's performative athleticism only extends so far. In this case, Ophelia Davis's race precludes her from fully traversing certain boundaries, presenting limits of identity and performance

In Chapter Five, "That Stirring Cry of Right Guard: Athletics, Race, and Space in College Girl Novels," I focus on the *Jane Allen Series* by Edith Bancroft, the *Grace Harlowe Series* by Jesse Graham Flower, and a number of short story collections about

women's college life. My final chapter considers the rising popularity of College Girl novels at the turn of the century and the athletic women that populate many of these stories. Not only do sportswomen flourish in this genre, but they are starting to be taken more seriously as athletes, reaching elite ranks in their physical pursuits. However, stories that begin to normalize women's participation in athletics do so through white, middle class, educated female characters. Women of color were erased from the narrative during a period when the inclusive potential of sport was heralded by women in the United States and seen as an avenue for reaffirming one's "Americanness" and commitment to American values. In college novels, athletics model democratic community and serve as an avenue to assimilate white women into an ideal citizenship, conflating whiteness, athletics, and nationalism. More to the point, characters in these stories delineate space as racialized and allow entry to non-white men and women only in "supporting" roles, such as that of the mascot. They dramatize the possibility that an ethnic outsider could infiltrate that space, so those outsiders must be thrown out. This exclusion is particularly jarring when one realizes that athletic spaces in these works are posed as egalitarian and democratic; however, they position non-participants as outsiders to both the university and national community, and threats to that democracy.

Ultimately, athletics matter. As Title IX approaches its fiftieth anniversary and conversations about women's athleticism persist, it is imperative that work be done to understand the history that contributes to attitudes about athletic women today. My dissertation offers a way to view athletic women as agents and comprised of multiple identities, rather than just masculine and static as they are often depicted. Through my exploration of newspapers and fiction, I demonstrate that the public performance of

athleticism shaped the reception of the female body both on the field and on the page, and print culture registers the ambivalence she occasioned. As Ahmed writes, "The work of inhabitance involves orientation devices; ways of extending bodies into spaces that create new folds, or new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space…orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space" (*Queerness* 11). Athletic women in the nineteenth century began the work of making those spaces familiar. They used their bodies to inhabit and shift them, and in the process created a model for female athletes today to embody. Though some "spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others," sportswomen today like Serena Williams have taken up the work of carving out places for more women in that space (Ahmed 11). Serena frequently encounters derision about her "masculine" body, the grunts that she makes when she plays tennis, her arguments with referees about bad calls, and her blackness in a white-dominated sport. However, as Claudia Rankine points out, Serena "won't be forced into stillness" ("Meaning"). She will not "keep to [the script]" that "demands the humble absorption of racist assaults" by black athletes ("Meaning"). Instead, echoing the public performances of nineteenth-century women, she uses her athleticism to enter many rooms from which she would otherwise be barred. The women of nineteenth-century literature did not completely level the playing field for athletes today, but they have given today's athletic women a blueprint to follow as they endeavor to make those unfamiliar spaces familiar.

CHAPTER 2

"OFF WENT BONNET AND SKIRT:" BOXING AND PROSTITUTION IN THE FLASH PRESS

On July 31, 1842, readers of *The Flash* were greeted by a lengthy but common description of a boxing match between two well-known prostitutes. This article, "A Ring Fight at Mrs. Smith's Between Nance Kemp and Kate Davis," was neatly situated between "Henry Shandfrod's Exhibition" and "Fight Between Bill Jones and Tommy the Greek." The author of this article, likely the paper's editor, writes about the match, for which slander was the cause. As the paper notes, Nance Kemp, one of the pugilists, was sexually involved with a "negro one night" and Kate, the second boxer, told her lover about it, in addition to saying that "Nance had false teeth." Bets were made, oyster stew was touted as a prize, and the fight began:

> Both being 'owly' as usual, they agreed to fight…. All being ready, they began to peel—Nance appeared very large round the head and showed a fine pair of kidneys; Kate on the reverse, stripped small, but well built for fighting. Nance was seconded by English Liz, and had a strapping wench for bottleholder. Kate was seconded by Mary Stothoff and had Lise Smith for bottleholder. Nance walked round with great grace, threw a large quid of snuff out of her mouth, and swore she would lick or burst. Kate was quite cool ("Ring Fight").

The match lasted five rounds and by round two, when time was called, Nance was "somewhat swelled round the head." Then, "Kate led off, tapping Nance in the mug, and knocking out her false teeth—first blood for Kate—a good rally and both down." By the third round, Nance was "looking groggy" and "Both caught hold of hair with the left and struck hard with the right—the seconds rushed in but it was no go, for Nance lost her false hair. Kate down." The last two rounds of the fight highlight the grotesque descriptions of Nance and Kate. They look "very red around their pimples," Kate laughs at Nance's head because it "shone like a glass bottle," and audiences shout "'well done, Swellhead!" Towards the end of the fight, "Nance with a glass of gin and Kate with a pitcher. Both let fly, with no effect. Another clinch, when the landlady appeared just awakened from a sweet slumber, and swore she would have no fighting in her house." From this description, a number of things become evident: There is a clear anxiety about miscegenation here, as the fight began over the purported intimacy between Nance Kemp, an Irish woman, and a black man. We can also see that there is an emphasis placed on artificiality, as Nance Kemp's fake teeth and hair are mentioned throughout the article. Additionally, there is a real interest in women's bodies in this space—both their grotesqueness and their celebration by the onlookers who cry, "'Bravo, Kate you're a good 'un,' while Nance rushed in to the yard for a tub of water to soak her head" ("Ring Fight"). Female athleticism is clearly wrapped up in questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality in mid-nineteenth century periodicals. In the coming pages I explore the intersections between many of these categories and what they can tell us about female athleticism and performance in nineteenth-century print.

This chapter discusses the racy flash press of the 1840s and its relationship to the prostitutes so often portrayed boxing one another in these papers. In source after source, scholars have pointed to the New York-based boxing match between Nell Saunders and Rose Harland in 1876 as the starting point for women's participation in boxing in the United States. Scholars do not dispute that women in England engaged in prize fighting as early as the eighteenth century, but they also do not acknowledge a history in the United States that begins during the antebellum period. Contrary to popular belief, though, women were engaged in boxing matches as early as the 1840s. There are many reasons that these matches are largely unfamiliar to us today, the fact that they took place between prostitutes among them. The flash press, whose focus was the promotion of prostitution, ran article after article that detailed prize fights and the pugilists involved in mid-century New York.

These boxing matches ranged from spontaneous bouts to organized fights. Sometimes the ring was assembled quickly, in response to a challenge from one woman to another; other times a fight was planned in advance to take place inside a brothel, meant to show off the physical prowess of a prostitute. The reportage afterwards, however, served to conventionalize these matches, as they distinguished roles that the supporting "team" played—bottleholders, seconds, referees. The flash articles also tended to give round-by-round accounts of the fights, describe different punches and boxing techniques, and detail the prize being offered to the winner. Whether the match was spontaneous, like a pick-up game today might be, or planned, the participants assumed similar behaviors and roles during the time of the bout and in the space of the match. The

bottleholders and seconds still assembled, a demarcation for the ring was made, and onlookers still gathered.

In this chapter I examine articles about female boxers throughout the Northeast in several bawdy periodicals[8] in an effort to understand how their bodies were written about, as well as how they themselves attempted to shape discussions regarding their bodies. In the mid-nineteenth century there were certainly many athletic women living outside of the Northeast and across the West; however, the circulation of the flash press papers was limited primarily to the New York-Philadelphia-Boston area and thus that region will be my primary focus in this chapter. What I discovered during my research is that fighting temporarily upsets the social and bodily order in the flash weeklies, but then prostitute sex outside of the ring reasserts that order. Participation by women in two ultra-embodied acts—boxing and prostitution—worked to render their bodies kinetic and sometimes difficult to read because of that movement. Articles appearing in the flash press about prostitutes engaged in boxing matches introduce readers to a form of athletic female masculinity that resists containment. The editors of the flash press initially tolerate that movement, at least when the prostitute is white. However, subsequent mocking of female pugilists' bodies, as well as the bodily threats they faced outside of the ring, reveal an anxiety concerning the blurring of gender identifications. In the face of that anxiety, the editors of the papers reestablish the social and bodily order that was overturned between the ropes. Outside of the female boxing ring, the flash papers tout masculine bravado and

[8] I was able to visit the American Antiquarian Society in December 2016 thanks to a fellowship through the Institute for African American Research at the University of South Carolina. Here I looked through their "Racy Newspapers" collection. This collection consists primarily of papers that are considered "flash weeklies," though there are a few closely related publications whose classification as flash papers is less clear. In this chapter I use the terms "flash weeklies" or "flash press" to refer to all the papers in this "Racy Newspaper" collection.

a libertine republicanism premised on male heterosexual indulgence, ideas that seem antithetical to the carnivalesque disorder that takes place in the ring. Ultimately pugilism articles reveal just as much about the fear of unclear boundaries in the flash press—public and private, masculine and feminine—as they do about the embodiment of athletic women during the nineteenth century.

My discussion will begin with historical background about boxing in nineteenth-century America. I first examine the ways that issues of race, gender, and class coincide during the germinal stages of pugilism in the United States. I then shift to a brief background about the flash press, the sexual underworld that it occupied, and its relationship to prostitutes engaged in boxing matches. A more focused analysis on prize fighting in the flash press follows, including a theorization of the boxers' embodiment and how their positions as both prostitutes and boxers affected the ways their bodies were viewed. The prostitute's female and muscular body moves through the spaces of the ring (and boxing articles on the pages of papers) and performs athleticism in ways that upend certain bodily orders. Rather than looking at these female boxers as simply women in possession of dissenting bodies, we can use Judith Halberstam's ideas about female masculinity to more fully understand their corporeality and sexuality. However, outside the space of the boxing ring, and outside of the boxing articles, the flash newspapers ultimately reassert gendered social hierarchies. The anxiety about the "pollution" of white, male bodies proves to be too much for boxing prostitutes to overcome outside the bounds of the ring and the articles depicting that space.

Overview of Boxing in the Nineteenth Century

Boxing is not a new sport or even one that finds its roots in the nineteenth century. Sometimes boxing is traced to Classical Greece, but there is research to suggest that Egyptians partook in something resembling boxing earlier than that. In fact, "[t]he first evidence of the sport can be found in Mesopotamian stone reliefs from the end of the fourth millennium BC" (Boddy 7). Although I am tracing the origins of female boxing in the United States on a consistent basis to the 1840s, there are accounts, often sexualized, of women and "Amazons" engaging in boxing and athletics outside of the United States that date back many centuries. I will not give an extensive history of boxing in the ancient world, as that is not the aim of this project and that undertaking would certainly require more space than I have. However, popular culture saw continuity between classical boxing roles and contemporary practices.

Boxing existed in England before it made its way to the United States. It began to take hold in the late-seventeenth century in the form of prize fighting and was widely popular by the mid-eighteenth century. Initially, prize fighting was a sport for lower-class citizens in England.[9] It is considered the less refined arm of boxing and is closely associated with bare-knuckle hitting, blood, gore, gambling, drinking, and spectacle (Gorn 47). Boxing made its way to the United States around the 1820s when English boxers began to trickle into the country, hoping to shape the direction of the sport here. Prize fighting was the modus operandi for a vast majority of participants in early American boxing. Its rise in popularity coincided with an influx of immigrants to the

[9] As the eighteenth century progressed, more and more aristocrats and nobility began to participate in boxing in various forms in England. Pugilism's reputation in popular culture began to shift from that of low-class sport to something more respectable and widespread. Prize fighting gave way to sparring, allowing middle-and-upper class citizens a less brutal entry into the sport.

United states and "pugilism thrived where ethnic communities were largest, in New York and Philadelphia and, to a lesser degree, Boston, Baltimore, and New Orleans" (Gorn 46). It wasn't until the last few decades of the nineteenth century that sparring and other more "respectable" forms of boxing began to take hold and entice middle-class men (and women, though their membership in boxing history is often overlooked) to participate.

Another cause for boxing's spread to the United States—Southern men traveling to England for school and developing a fondness for pugilism there—rankled Thomas Jefferson. It is said that those young men came back from England and introduced the sport to friends in the States. Jefferson, though, saw little appeal in this prospect. He noted that the young, educated man "learns drinking, horse racing and boxing…He is led by the strongest of human passions, into a spirit of female intrigue…or a passion for whores, destructive of his health, and in both cases learns to consider fidelity to the marriage bed as an ungentlemanly practice" (qtd. in Gorn 59). Jefferson certainly equates boxing with a lower-class status, but more importantly, he sees it as antithetical to his vision of republicanism. What Jefferson misses, however, is that more and more men took to the ring in efforts to reify their masculinity. An entire subculture of men challenged the politics of respectable republicanism that Jefferson espoused. As many scholars point out, urban spaces were becoming more crowded as the nineteenth century churned on. Men felt that they needed a means of strengthening their muscles, and relatedly, their masculinity; after all, with increased industrialization, demanding physical labor was becoming scarcer and men were thought to be more effeminate. The fear of dwindling masculinity also pervaded the flash press, whose readers were concentrated in crowded, urban environments. As a result, they became part of a subculture that

encouraged a libertine republicanism about which Jefferson expressed such horror. Their libertine ideas, Patricia Cline Cohen et al. note, stood for "attacks on privilege, an emphasis on erotic pleasure, [and] sexuality as intrinsic and natural" (73-74). Male readers could finally feel as if they were part of a community, a subculture that encouraged intermingled images of illicit sex and boxing. However, throughout the pages of the flash press, articles appeared about women boxing one another, and sometimes defeating and humiliating men in the ring, too. What do we make of a subculture that is in defiance of respectable norms of republicanism and encourages virile displays of masculinity, yet frequently reports on prostitutes engaging in grotesque battles and defeating male opponents in matches?

The subculture that made up the flash press readers was a counterpublic, which, I contend, is important to understanding the unsettling of distinctions between public and private within the flash weeklies. Michael Warner defines a counterpublic as a group that maintains a subordinate status and is defined by "[its] tension with a larger public" (Warner 56-57). Additionally, a counterpublic "can mediate the most private and intimate meanings of gender and sexuality. It can work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived" (57). In many ways, the main purpose of the flash press is to mediate gender and sexuality and to make the private public. Doing so normalizes certain behaviors and delivers the message to young, heterosexual men that the illicit subculture to which they belong is thriving and acceptable. The attempt here is to make known a new form of sexualized citizenship in the mold of the heterosexual and sexually promiscuous male that would have previously remained private. In other words, the editors and readers of the paper belong to a

counterpublic that embraces and reifies their notions of libertine republicanism through the dissemination of newspapers about prostitution. They are active participants "in collective world making through publics of sex and gender" (Warner 57). One of the effects of that counterpublic, though, is the publicizing of female masculinity that reveals threats to the libertine republicanism the counterpublic stands for. In an effort to make possible one new form of sexualized citizenship, the flash press also enables the creation of another model of gendered citizenship—athletic women. The means for forming and strengthening this counterpublic—the flash press and its focus on prostitutes—also becomes the mechanism capable of revealing its anxieties and weaknesses.[10]

In the process of making a non-dominant social order public, the flash weeklies use humor and the grotesque to present an alternative way of living. The editors of the papers layered each issue with hyperbolic writing, falsehoods, personal vendettas, blackmail, and bribery, making it difficult to separate historical events from mocking satire. However, even in the moments when they may be exaggerating the events in the ring or attempting to humiliate a foe, they do so by upending the normal social order. Whether or not a description of a match between prostitutes is completely accurate, the boxing narrative that is presented teaches us about the ways that athletic female bodies

[10] To this point, I have only mentioned men and women of European descent involved in the sport. Black men were less likely to participate in boxing in the first half of the nineteenth century and when they are depicted engaging in boxing, it tends to be on plantations, often at the behest of their owners. Similarly, black women tend to be shown in fistfights in efforts to stave off assault and rape on plantations This orientation to pugilism is a stark contrast to the depictions the flash press gives us of prostitutes fighting one another for "rights" to certain gentleman clients and to prove their own endurance and sexual prowess. It isn't until the last few decades of the nineteenth century that I can find consistent references to white women strengthening their bodies and practicing pugilistic exercises in efforts to prevent sexual assault. For more history about boxing, fighting, and wrestling on plantations, see T.J. Obi Desch's work *Fighting for Honor*. Other texts that include scenes of boxing or fist-fighting on plantations include Henry Bibb's and Frederick Douglass's slave narratives, and C.W. Larison's 1883 biography, *Silvia Dubois, (Now 116 years old): A Biografy of the Slav Who Whipt Her Mistress and Gand her Fredom*. For the purposes of this chapter, and due to the availability of primary sources, I will focus on depictions of boxing within in the pages of the flash press.

function and perform within *that* space. The flash papers embody many of the qualities that Mikhail Bakhtin identifies in carnivalesque literature, and his theory provides a useful framework through which to consider the destabilization of a particular nineteenth-century urban social order. In articles about boxing prostitutes, readers get an upended snapshot of New York society: an emphasis on all things bodily, a sense of egalitarianism, however short-lived, and a focus on a collective of people—boxing prostitutes (Bakhtin 7-11, 18-19). For instance, in the ring, the "gap between peddlers of sex (prostitutes) and their managers (brothelkeepers)" shrunk, women were as fast and strong as the men they boxed, if not more so, and gender binaries became much less distinct (Hobson 30). But, just as Bakhtin notes, these transgressions are temporary performances, and we are ultimately reminded that prostitute sex outside the ring reasserts gendered, classed, and raced hierarchies. Within the individual boxing articles, carnival-like chaos reigns, but outside of that space the paper reestablishes order. Importantly, there is a space for transgression in the ring if a prostitute is not white, but that space is limited. Outside of the ring, the reassertion of social order is starker when the prostitute in discussion is not white. Libertine republicanism only weakens social order so much, and the weeklies ultimately remind the reader that there are established hierarchies that remain in place.

Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century

In the mid-nineteenth century, large cities like New York experienced a "sexual revolution," as Timothy Gilfoyle calls it. The 1840s and 1850s saw continued increases in the number of brothels popping up in cities, and national figures like Walt Whitman and Sylvester Graham openly wondered what would become of men who engaged with

prostitutes. Certain streets, like Broadway in New York, were linked in public consciousness to illicit sex. The *Tribune* noted in 1855: "'One is so accustomed to the sight of these gaudily dressed butterflies… that the streets look very strange without them'" (qtd. in Gilfoyle 30). In fact, Gilfoyle estimates that anywhere between 5 to 10 percent of young women in New York were prostitutes, or "frail women," at some point during the antebellum period (59).[11] He posits that many women turned to prostitution because they were in financial need, came from broken homes, hoped to escape parental mistreatment, or had been orphaned (65). Some women engaged in the trade part-time, often as street-walkers or in tenement houses, while others made prostitution their full-time occupations in brothels. Prostitutes tended to be a mix of women from the Northeastern United States and Irish immigrants, and their class identities varied from lower-class to middle-class women. Interestingly, Gilfoyle discovered that Irish prostitutes gravitated towards streetwalking while American prostitutes more often took up residence in brothels (63).[12] Just as class identities within the world of prostitution varied, men who visited brothels were not simply working-class men. It was not uncommon for middle-class (and sometimes married) men to find their way into a brothel for an illicit sexual encounter. This was due, in part, to the proximity of brothels and middle-and-upper-class homes throughout neighborhoods in New York.

While prostitution was technically illegal in several Northeastern cities, such as New York, during the antebellum period, it was widely tolerated and rarely prosecuted

[11] The moniker of "frail woman" is particularly interesting to consider alongside descriptions of boxing prostitutes. This nomenclature occurs frequently in the flash papers, even when describing women engaged in boxing matches. Like the athletic prostitutes the term "frail" often describes, the word is a display of contradictions. *OED* notes that it can mean to be physically weak, to be morally weak and prone to temptation, or to beat something and thrash around.

[12] This difference manifests in flash weekly depictions of certain prostitutes, like Hal Grandy, constantly bustling along the streets of New York.

harshly. Instead, it became a of matter of everyday life for most residents of large Northeastern cities. As Marilynn Wood Hill puts it, prostitution had a "dubious socio-legal status. Prostitution's position at the fringes of the law and outside the realm of respectability allowed a woman freedom from many of the restrictions and conventions that circumscribed the activities and opportunities of other females" (2). Officially outside the law:

> New York's prostitutes were in a vulnerable position, constantly subject to legal harassment and discrimination. Nevertheless, many found that cooperative relationships with fellow citizens and with public officials facilitated their utilization of the workplace, the legal system, and the municipal structure to their advantage. In mid-century New York's rapidly changing urban environment, prostitutes were more often integrated into than ostracized from the daily lives of ordinary citizens (Hill 3).

However, prostitutes were not living an idyllic experience and their lives came with many dangers and hardships. They were subject to violence, disease, degradation, and difficult working situations. Brothels put up with random raids and attacks by men, prostitutes were physically assaulted on the streets, and sometimes prostitutes were harassed and arrested. The prostitutes and street-walkers, rather than the madams and brothel owners, tended to suffer most (Hobson 30). Articles recur in the weeklies that describe brothel raids or verbally abusive behavior towards sex workers. As Gilfoyle notes, this violence spoke to a larger issue. "Male hatred of and hostility towards women, rather than moving underground or being marginalized, became a sufficient cause for violence. Rioting, rather than upholding traditions, redressing legitimate grievances, or reacting against

social injustice, served as a vehicle for certain men to control and intimidate certain women" (89-90). Put another way, within the confines of boxing articles, prostitutes engaged in fights and physical activities in ways that celebrated their ability to challenge the social order, and which they entered of their own choosing; but, outside of those articles, both on the other pages of the flash press and in the world outside of print, sex-workers were vulnerable to real violence and degradation.

The public display of prostitutes' bodies—and thus, their exposure to violence—both in and outside the boxing ring is closely linked to their association with theatrical spaces and performance. Prostitution's quasi-legal status led to a close relationship between theaters and brothels, a relationship that was openly advertised in the press. The weeklies frequently compare prostitutes to actresses and describe the third tier space. The third tier was a specific section of the playhouse reserved for prostitutes and their clients. Courtesans could use that space to simply attend a performance, conduct business with their male clients, or engage in fighting matches. Theaters became intimately linked in public consciousness with sexual licentiousness and theater managers declared that they maintained the third tier so prostitutes would draw men to the theater's performances. Much like the class-associations of brothels, theaters maintained certain levels of respectability and catered to different classes of prostitutes (likely with varying political associations as well). The close connections between theaters and prostitution cannot be overstated, with some brothels even connecting physically to theater buildings (Gilfoyle 111-112). Prostitutes were aligned with theatrical spaces and fighting, calling into question their athletic displays and sexual activities. What was

not? How were women's bodies and fighting in the ring meant to be read—as athletic performance or something else?

Third tier spaces worked to link boxing and prostitution in the public consciousness. Frequently, descriptions of prostitutes fighting with one another in the third tier circulated in the weeklies. For instance, an August 1842 issue of *The Flash* details a fight at the Eagle Theater: "There was a fine mill the other night at the Eagle Theater, without any previous notice to the public, between Eliza Brown and gallus Bob H—n, in which the latter was whipped in six rounds, although he drew first blood, and was dragged off the field of battle by his fancy woman, with one peeper closed, and snuff box enlarged" ("Freaks"). Articles about the third tier relegate women's athletic displays to entertainment spaces, a connection that authors would make frequently by the mid-century. As authors begin to develop the athletic female character type, they put athleticism in close conversation with theater and performance and use those theatrical connections to their advantage. Over the course of the nineteenth century, authors recognize the productive potential that performance offers athletic female characters, and in the flash press we see the germinal stages of athletic performativity.

The Rise of the Flash Press

At precisely the same moment that prostitution was becoming a commercialized, public activity and blurring distinctions between the public and private, the flash press was coming into being. As Patricia Cline Cohen, Timothy J. Gilfoyle, and Helen Lekowitz Horowitz describe, "From the fall of 1841 to the spring of 1843, an extensive sexual underworld of New York City came to sudden public notice through an eruption of small weekly newspapers with bold titles. [The papers] aimed to entertain and

enlighten literate sporting men about leisure-time activities and erotic entertainments available in New York" (1). These papers were known for their mixture of biting humor, mocking articles, gossip about prostitutes, and coverage of theater and sports (1). Cohen et al. note that "the papers offered guidance to men young and old intent on navigating the new world of unrestricted pleasure and commercialized leisure in the city. They frequently defended such behaviors in the vernacular of republicanism and democracy" (1). The flash papers, though in existence for just a short period, had a profound effect on New York and print culture more broadly.[13] New York and other large American cities were experiencing a proliferation of newspapers during the 1840s. But, until the flash press came on the scene, there were not newspapers that encouraged prostitution and illicit sex, served as guidebooks to brothels, and brought together a subculture of readers who had previously been silent about their participation in this sexual underworld.

Until the late 1980s, very few scholars were aware of the existence of the flash papers. When Patricia Cline Cohen was doing research at the American Antiquarian Society in 1987 she came across the collection of flash papers there and began to discuss them in scholarship. Since then, several scholars have explored the collection and begun to make use of it, but to date nobody has mined it for its rich resources on women's athletics. As Cohen et al. point out, the "contemporary readers of the papers, men (and women) who bought them in theaters, saloons, and barbershops, had little reason to save their copies and perhaps much reason to dispose of them quickly. What hooked buyers—gossip about sex accompanied by names and initials of real people—would be exactly why they would be quickly discarded" (6). Because of the ephemeral nature of these

[13] While the flash press came into being in the 1840s, it had a number of precursors in the early-nineteenth century; however, those publications are not the focus of this chapter.

papers, few hard copies exist today, and the ones that do are at the American Antiquarian Society.

While each flash paper was slightly different from the next, there was a great deal of overlap in the content of the periodicals, and each was salacious and mocking in nature. The papers were overwhelmingly concerned with prostitution and sports, though these concerns were framed in varying ways. Some publications were open about their encouragement of prostitution, while others disingenuously denounced it when the papers came under attack by moral reformers. There was a section dedicated specifically to sports in each paper, usually focusing on boxing, horse racing, cock-fighting, and pedestrianism. Frequently, the flash papers had "walk about town" or "fair sex" columns, in which editors went from brothel to brothel and described them for readers.[14] The reading public also wrote in to the periodicals with gossip about which men were sleeping with which prostitutes, who was cheating on whom, and what sexual scandals were happening around town. For instance, the *New York City Scorpion* published the following in June 1849: "A young lady, residing in Christopher Street, is in the habit of making assignations with a notorious character, a married man, and going with him to a house in Mercer Street"; "Who can give me information concerning that man with a white cravat and a carpet bag, who was seen to enter an alley way in Green street, just below Spring, on Thursday evening last, with an Irish girl barefooted. Wonder how the folks are at home. Look out, or you will not get off so easy next time"; "Mrs. V. in Carmine Street has almost gone into the blind stagger's [sic] since my recent exposures. She had better hold on a little for I have some rich and rare exposures to make of her

[14] Six editors were largely responsible for the flash weeklies: William J. Snelling, George Washington Dixon, George Wilkes, George B. Wooldridge, Thaddeus W. Meighan, and Thomas L. Nichols.

numerous assignations about town" ("Life in New York"). These walks about town literally mapped out the city and brothel locations while also serving as a space for men to humiliate their enemies and castigate prostitutes with whom they were unhappy.

In addition to gossip, men would write in with praise for certain madams, and editors would include columns describing balls attended by prostitutes, which included detailed descriptions of the women's physical appearances. Oftentimes, in the next issue, men and women who had been disparaged in the paper or falsely accused of something would respond with anger. Occasionally, even letters from prostitutes would appear in print, admonishing the editors for printing false information about their brothels or who they were having sex with. Several of the articles that I came across in my research describe prostitutes reading the flash papers, and there were advertisements marketing products and services for women; thus, there was a female reading public for the papers, though how large it was is unclear. Editors even ran a section in every issue about the theater. This section sometimes discussed plays at different theaters in large cities, but more often than not, it described the "third tier" and the prize fights that occurred there.

Perhaps the most important aspect of these papers is what they tell us about a counterpublic that pushes against the seemingly monolithic Victorian culture of sexual mores and morality. The openness with which the flash press wrote about subjects of a bawdy sexual nature worked to embolden men who would otherwise keep a low profile in their quest for illicit sex. They began to forge "a male sociability through their nonconforming sexual behaviors that flaunted conventions" (Cohen et al. 9). During a decade when American republicanism was critical of "privilege, luxury, and corruption," the flash press lobbied for the acceptance of a libertine republicanism (55). As Cohen et

al. describe, libertine republicanism was the antithesis of republicanism as it was conventionally understood. It promoted male heterosexual indulgence, gave great attention to prostitution, "espoused a radical, democratic critique of privilege and hierarchy," and was hostile to organized religion (56). It is precisely this libertine ethos that led to the short-lived nature of the flash press. The weeklies faced libel lawsuit after libel lawsuit, the editors were frequently arrested for libel, and by 1843 the flash press as it was known had been dissembled by lawsuits.

Boxing in the Flash Press

Flash papers, such as *The New York Sporting Whip*, *The Flash*, and *The Rake* were deeply invested in sport and the pages of these papers were filled with articles about boxing, pedestrianism, cock-fighting, horse racing, and sailing. The article quoted at the beginning of this chapter, "A Ring Fight at Mrs. Smith's Between Nance Kemp and Kate Davis," is quite typical of the stories that appear in the flash press papers about prostitutes engaged in boxing matches. Several of these items appear in the section of the papers entitled "The Ring" and go into round-by-round details about the matches. Most tell the reader who was designated as the "second," or the coach-like figure who assists each boxer during the match and in between rounds. As is the case here, articles identify the initial cause of the match—slander and racism in this case—and the prize offered—oyster stews. More often than not, the prizes for women's matches tend to be food items of some sort, as an 1842 article in *The Flash*, "Grand Flare Up," shows: "Beck offered in the vestibule of the Tombs to fight Peanut for two clam soups and a bottle of ginger pop." However, monetary prizes are also offered, though not with the same frequency they are offered at men's matches. The descriptions of the boxers themselves vary more from

article to article than some of the other details, but most focus on the bodies of the women in detail. Each piece vacillates between describing the grotesqueness of the women boxing (here, Kemp's toothlessness, swollen head, loss of hair, and the artificial nature of her teeth and hair) and the tension between their simultaneously masculinized and feminized embodiment. These images evoke Bakhtin's ideas of the carnivalesque and the grotesque.

Articles about boxing prostitutes in flash weeklies focus on prostitutes in the Northeast. More specifically, though, they focus on prostitutes who are identified by ethnic names and markers. Kate Davis, mentioned above, is a regular on the boxing scene and in a September 1842 issue of *The Flash,* "Kate was put in a cell with an Irishwoman, with whom she made fight, but got off second best" ("Walking Match"). Kate's Irishness, invoked elsewhere in the weeklies, is mirrored back at her. Other women with Irish names pepper the pages about boxing, including Moll Fowler, Moll Quiff, Mag Howell, and Harriet "Hal" Grandy (who is closely associated with Irishness, but is at times also described as "untameable as a Ukraine steed, and as uncontrollable as an Hyrcaniau Tigress" ("Grand Pitch"). Catherine Billings is identified as "Fightin' Kate" in a September 1855 article in *The Whip*, which states that "Lizzie opened the ball by letting her digits fly right into the *potato trap of Kate*" ("Prize Fight," emphasis mine). Irish heritage is not the only identity dealt with explicitly and derogatorily, though it is most often cited when negatively referring to prostitutes. Many women are linked to other ethnic and national identities, including Dutch Lize, French Camille, French Mag, Yellow Emma, Dutchess de Berri, Miranda La Vigne, La Rue, and English Liz, to name just a few. Noticeably, madams held in higher regard and who were part of the upper

echelon of prostitutes, are not tied to any ethnic markers. Julia Brown, for instance, is revered by editors in article after article. "Princess Julia," as she is commonly called, is described as a beautiful, sophisticated woman who throws magnificent balls, which are described in detail in the pages of the weeklies. While editors describe Julia Brown's grace, physicality and business at length, they never attach racial or identity markers to her. Other accounts abound of editors lavishing praise on certain prostitutes, like Fanny Ellsler,[15] who are linked to white identities. *The Flash* writes, for instance, "Park Benjamin, of the *New World,* calls Fanny Ellsler a 'common prostitute,' which is as gross a libel as we ever printed… If she was a prostitute at all, she is not a common, but an uncommon one" ("Fanny Ellsler"). In this world, to be absent of clear racial and ethnic markers is to be privileged, whereas to be marked by race or ethnicity is to be associated with an inferior class of prostitutes.

While black prostitutes did work in and run brothels in the Northeast, they occupied one of the lowest rungs of the social ladder. When written about in the weeklies, black-run brothels were described in degrading ways and the fear of miscegenation is apparent in the language used to describe them. The flash press was certainly not racially progressive, nor did the editors of the weeklies seem interested in depicting pugilistic efforts of non-white woman. One of the few accounts involving a boxing match between a black woman and a white woman is depicted in *The Whip's* "Fight Between Two Cyprians of Rotten Row." In this article the black prostitute, who is not named, is simply described as the "black heifer," "the black hag," "blackee," or the

[15] It is likely that the Fanny Ellsler mentioned here, a prostitute who appears in the pages of the flash weeklies, adopted her name as a reference to the Austrian ballet dancer, Fanny Elssler. The latter Elssler, who was blackmailed by the flash press, was touring in New York in the first half of the 1840s, performing in a number of theaters in the city.

"black 'un," and her skin pronounced hard and scaly. A number of other boxing matches take place in an African churchyard, though at least some of the women involved in the fight are white and Irish prostitutes. "Prize Fighting Not Stopped" states that, "a regular pitched battle came off in the African Churchyard last Saturday, between Lize Pelsine and Emma Franklin. Lize was seconded by Nance Kemp, Charley M, acting as bottle holder. The fight lasted nine rounds ("Prize Fighting Not Stopped")." The suggestion here is that both the boxing matches and the location are commonplace, but the appearance of a black women in the boxing ring would not be.

The treatment of non-white women and men in the flash press illustrates the ways that these papers attempted to align Irishness with blackness and contributed to the racialization of the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century. The flash weeklies were published at a time when Irish immigrants were beginning to come to the United States in larger numbers, and thus reckoning with questions of race and whiteness in a new country. For much of the 1840s and 1850s the Irish were closely aligned with slaves, blackness, and a non-white racial identity. They were almost always part of an unskilled, non-artisan labor class, and derided as "white slaves" (Roediger 133-34). Prostitutes, in particular, had strong connections with Irishness. Gilfoyle notes that, "From 1825 to 1829, only 33 percent of the parents (of prostitutes) had foreign roots and only 16 percent of the girls themselves were born abroad…From 1845 to 1849, some 79 percent of the prostitutes' parents were immigrants, as were 38 percent of the prostitutes themselves" (65). As Noel Ignatiev writes, "[In U.S. cities, the Irish] were commonly thrown together with free Negroes. Irish-and-Afro-Americans fought each other and the police, socialized and

occasionally intermarried, and developed a common culture of the lowly. They also both suffered the scorn of those better situated" (3).

David Roediger also points to the friendly socialization between black and Irish people in the 1840s but complicates the picture by discussing the increasing desire by the Irish to be identified as white, often at the expense of the black community. In fact, in the flash press this impulse to separate oneself from any associations with blackness appears again and again when miscegenation is mentioned. Nance Kemp, for instance, engages in a boxing match because she is accused of having sex with a black man. The paper deems this slanderous and Nance dukes it out with the prostitute who brought this charge against her. The Irish also sought reprieve in the Democratic party and the Catholic Church, institutions that often espoused proslavery causes in the 1840s and pitted them against abolitionist rhetoric (Roediger 140). The large population of Irish people in the United States also understood there was power in numbers, specifically voting power, which aided in their eventual acceptance as white. The flash papers, which were stridently opposed to organized religion, sometimes opposed to the Democratic party, and definitively racist, dealt with the Irish by racializing them and disallowing associations with whiteness, despite pushback on this alignment from the Irish women written about in the papers.

The flash press papers align the Irish prostitutes in its pages with blackness, or at least non-whiteness, during a time when their racial standing in the United States was very much in flux. The prostitutes described in the papers in the most offensive ways are consistently Irishwomen, who are portrayed as innately pugilistic. They are also depicted as grotesque, low-class, masculine, overbearing, deviant in their embodiment (sometimes

called “freaks”), undesirable, filthy, and aggressive. Irish men are emasculated in the weeklies by prostitutes portrayed as controlling and aggressive. This happened most often in the ring, where prostitutes would actually box the men with whom they were sleeping. It is in these moments that the weeklies blur Irishness with blackness. For instance, when Hal Grandy boxes “the Gingerbread Man,” whose sobriquets include Gingerballs and Gingerblue, this man’s names are significant (“Grand Pitch”). “Ginger” here serves to reference both his Irishness *and* his blackness. The name Gingerbread, bread that is molasses-flavored and dark in color, aligns Grandy’s partner with a dark complexion just as much as the word ginger conjures up images of red hair and Irishness.[16] This link to both blackness and Irishness seems to be an effort on the part of the editors to further marginalize the Irish by associating them with a group of people that is already considered inferior to white Americans. Fights located in African Churchyards also work to accomplish this marginalization. The boxers located in this space are often the Irishwomen who populate the pages of the press. By presenting matches involving Irish prostitutes taken up in the African Churchyard, the weeklies are yet again subtly racializing the Irish and denying them the whiteness that they so desired.

Despite the prejudices of the flash editors against the Irish, the prostitutes seem to consider each other to be part of the same community, brought together through athletics. These boxing articles depict the athletic community that prostitutes form, though the dehumanization of black prostitutes often leaves them on the periphery. In the aforementioned fights in the African Churchyard, the women involved—Nance Kemp and Emma Franklin—are regulars on the boxing scene, appearing in other articles across

[16] The use of the word “ginger” to refer to somebody with red hair dates back to 1823, according to the *OED*.

the flash weeklies about pugilism. And this reappearance at different fights is very common. The same women frequently appear in articles as participants, onlookers, bottle-holders, or seconds at fights. A December 1841 issue of *The Flash*, for example, describes the aftereffects of a fight:

> *Miss* Capiteau had three ribs fractured, [illegible] sneaked away from the upraised arm and fist of the Dutchess de Berri and Ann Post and H—M—lay prostate—horrible effects of pugilism, liquor, and love! At this stage entered Officer X and a score of leatherheads. Julia Brown entered bail for her lady boarders, and those who had no money, beaux or boarders, went home without their ear and finger-rings—devil take the hindmost! ("For the Flash").

This description not only mentions women like Dutchess de Berri, who reappears at many fights, but also shows that prostitutes like Julia Brown, who is never portrayed engaging in a physical match, are still very much part of the athletic community. Even when the match participants were both men, the courtesans of New York could be found in attendance. "The Great Contest Between Yankee Sullivan, the Champion, and Bell of Brooklyn, for $300 A Side" describes a contest that took place "up the East River" and the huge crowds that made the multi-hour boat ride to see the fight. Signaling women's investment in the sporting world, *The Rake* writes, "Leading courtesans…had distinguished themselves with false hair, moustachios, and whiskers; and by the assumption of male attire, completed the deception on all, save our experienced eye. The lovely and accomplished Julia Brown, in a 'middy's' uniform, excited our too susceptible nature by the display of a form of perfect symetry [sic] and goodly proportions, fully developed" ("The Great Contest"). As early as the 1840s, women understood how to

perform roles and costume their bodies as a means of gaining access to an athletic community and a space that was typically gendered male. It is notable here that the cross-dressing merely "completed the deception;" the women in attendance would not have successfully assimilated into the crowd without also possessing a knowledge of boxing and its conventions.

The presence of prostitutes at matches and the location of matches in the space of a brothel speak to a supportive, athletic female community that encouraged a proficiency and participation in sport, despite social stigmas that rallied against it. In "Grand Pitch Between Harriet Grandy and the Gingerbread Man" the writer notes that "When all was prepared the scene of the combat presented a novel sight. The stoop was filled with blooming damsels dotted by an eight o'clock clerk here and there." Also in attendance was "Julia Brown with a small dark Spanish looking man leaning on her shoulder... Harriet's second was her friend Melinda Hoag." When each round of the fight is described, the reporter writes, "Ginger came up wild, tried his left and right but did not get home. Hal then rushed in, closed, and seizing him by the shirt, stripped it into ribbands, while at the same time she industriously bit his ear (cries of 'foul!' from the stoop and 'Time' from Julia Brown)" ("Grand Pitch"). The presence of Julia Brown and the other "blooming damsels" at the prize fights and their engagement with the match shows that there was an active, athletic subculture among prostitutes during the antebellum period. They are not only present and engaged in different athletic activities, but their involvement showcases a knowledge of the rules and conventions of boxing and other sports. And perhaps it should be unsurprising that an athletic community of women manifested itself amongst prostitutes in the antebellum period. Gilfoyle describes the

closeness and community that many prostitutes experienced, recounting letters they would write to one another, the care they took of each other when sick, and the protectiveness they felt when they saw certain male clients mistreating women (68).

In addition to showing up for prize fights, prostitutes in 1840s New York appear to have taken physical training prior to fights seriously. A September 1842 issue of *The Flash* describes a "training day" at Mrs. Lewis's:

> The sports commenced in the afternoon and continued throughout the night till the next morning, with intermissions. Before commencing with the fighting or lover's quarelling, I will proceed to give you the memos of all the inmates, as far as I am acquainted therewith. Ann Simpson, Fanny Mosier, Virginia Livingston, alias Dorothy Dragglenail, Amanda Green, and two Irish suckers, named Yankee Sullivan and Country McCleester, from their pugilistic qualities ("Dear Flash").

This training day is significant because it points to a culture in which women were trained in athletics. They worked to develop their skills and strengthen their bodies; they did not simply step into a ring and start swinging. The nicknames given to two of the women in attendance, Yankee Sullivan and Country McCleester, is especially interesting because Sullivan and McCleester were renowned, male, bare-knuckle prize fighters who were constantly written about in the flash press. Both would go on to participate in high-profile matches and win numerous titles in their careers. The suggestion is that if these women were at Mrs. Lewis's to train, they took their athletic abilities of the women somewhat seriously. Because the flash publications were full of untruths, the training day may also be a fabrication. However, the illustration of prostitutes training their bodies and improving their boxing skills, whether it actually occurred or not, gives female

athleticism a degree of legitimacy. There mere act of writing and publishing this description forces readers to consider what it would mean for a female boxer to train. Even physical descriptions of boxers' bodies illustrate the training that likely went into preparing for matches: "Harriet's [flesh] was loose and flabby in texture, and of a pale greenish cast. Her frame, however, which is tall, gaunt, and bony, possesses many fine points and gives indication of great strength and activity" ("Grand Pitch"). While this illustration of Hal Grandy's body points to an athletic ability and strength, it is not without complications. Grandy's "loose and flabby" flesh, with its greenish-hue, also speaks to the hardships that prostitutes faced.[17]

Prize fighting, though, was not the only outlet for women's athletic activity. Many women, like Harriet "Hal" Grandy (sometimes called Harriet Grundy), Becky Powell, Ellen Sewell, Nance Kemp, Kate Davis, The Great Western, Emma Franklin, and Dutch Lize engage in multiple athletic events throughout the run of the flash weeklies. Many pages of the press are taken up by pieces on running and walking matches, among other strength training activities. On September 4, 1842, *The Flash* describes Becky Powell and her daughter officiating a walking match between the "fair ones," or prostitutes ("Walking Match"). *The Sunday Flash* on September 19, 1841, gives a play-by-play of a footrace between Dutch Lize and French Mag, instigated because of "an altercation between the parties, concerning Dutchy's *beat* along the Broadway side; to which, it appears, Mag had asserted an equal right" ("Grand Match"). This race, on which $5 was bet, shows the shear athletic abilities of the women who took part in New York's athletic

[17] In fact, both the flash press and scholars like Timothy Gilfoyle, Christine Stansell, and Marilyn Wood Hill document much of the violence inflicted on women working in the sex trade during the mid-nineteenth century. Prostitutes were subject to beatings, attacks, rape, insults, and murder. In addition to violence, many prostitutes suffered because they were malnourished, could not afford warm or proper clothing, or lived in unsanitary conditions.

culture. Dutch Lize won the match with the "Time, 3 min. 42 sec., distance ½ mile, less 27 yards" ("Grand Match"). If those results are accurate, that pace is quite fast and would be untenable for a person who had not built up her endurance and muscle strength. In an indication that there was an audience eager to read more about this athletic subculture of women, *The Sunday Flash* published several follow-up articles about Dutch Lize's other challengers. In October of the next month, readers learns that Dutch Lize is now challenging other athletes to show her confidence in her own abilities. After she beats The Great Western, the author writes that "[Dutch Lize] has now proved herself to be of undoubted speed and bottom, and has established a reputation for herself that time itself cannot shake." The article ends by noting that, "Next week, there is a sweepstakes coming off, free for all runners under the weight of 150 lbs. for an elegantly worked chemise and cashmere shawl. Entrance $10" ("Match Race"). Not only is there interest enough in these matches to publish updates, but there is a regularity with which these activities took place.

The Embodiment of Boxers

The inseparability between a boxer and her body creates a challenge when looking at boxing prostitutes in the flash weeklies, in part because it seems difficult to inhabit both identities in the same corporeal being. Boxing is linked to hardened, masculine bodies and prostitution is often aligned with feminine corporeality. The women at the center of discussion are overtly sexualized and make their money through the commercialization of sex. Simultaneously, some are depicted as grotesque "she-males" the moment they step in the ring. At times they are shown boxing other prostitutes, other times their opponents are male clients that they fight into submission

and humiliation. The delineation between public display and private sexual encounters is confusing and their physical prowess in the ring often seems linked to their sexual abilities outside of it.

In the nineteenth-century United States prostitution was going through a moment in which it was being contested. The flash press was advocating for the trade and in doing so, made the sight of a sexualized female body slightly less deviant. This is, of course, not to say that prostitutes were fully accepted or respected. Within the community of flash press readers, though, sexualized women were not fully disparaged in the way that the typical Victorian ideals suggested they should be. Similarly, the frequency of articles about prostitutes boxing one another began to make normal the sight of athletic and muscular women engaged in what was typically considered masculine behavior. Even the liminal spaces in which "frail ones" functioned left them in ambiguous legal situations—within the ring, where violence is a given and death is not prosecuted, there are few legal ramifications. Outside the ring, prostitution occupied a quasi-legal standing, in which it was accepted. So how are we to think about the embodiment of athletic prostitutes at a time when they were simultaneously experiencing a degree of acceptance from one bawdy subculture and dismissal from another more conservative public? What of the overt sexualization of prostitutes accompanied by descriptions of their "masculine" behavior and participation in gory spectacle? In this section I will attempt to make sense of these indistinct boundaries and what they reveal about the flash press, gender roles, and embodiment in antebellum America.

I begin by thinking about the concurrent sexualization and masculinization of female boxers in the flash press. How are we meant to interpret prostitutes—who are so

associated with sex—in the boxing ring, which is linked historically in public consciousness to violence and masculinity? There is little anxiety about lesbianism in the flash press,[18] but there is certainly still an unease about a public and embodied presentation of gender. The press complicates binaries, depicting prostitutes in very different ways depending on their ethnicity and class standing. For instance, Ellen Thompson Placide, a madam held in high regard, is described as follows in *Dixon's Polyanthos*: "Ellen has beautiful black eyes, ringlets of jet, and always dresses well. She is as fine a specimen of frail and fallen humanity as man ever looked on...[S]he has a triumphant proof of the supremacy of not only her beauty but her intellect, for she is in high, very high favor with one of the leading comedians of the age" ("Sketches of Character"). The focus here is on Ellen's intellect and her beautiful, feminine features; she is the object of the male gaze, both explicitly in the article and with male readership more broadly. This type of description is common in the flash weeklies, which constantly describe woman's physical appearance in detail.

In contrast with Ellen's description, Hal Grandy, a lower-class Irishwoman, is castigated by *The Whip*:

[18] Marilynn Wood Hill writes at length in *Their Sisters' Keepers* about the heterosexual relationships between female prostitutes and men in the nineteenth century. Through an examination of prostitutes' letters and diaries, Hill concludes that, while much correspondence between men and women is simply business-like in nature, there are many instances of men and women forming true friendships or romantic relationships with one another. Helen Jewett's relationship with Frank Rivers is perhaps the best examples of a prostitute forming a strong attachment to a male lover (267-75). Hill also contends that warm relationships—friendships—existed amongst prostitutes but that, "Whether nineteenth-century female friendships among prostitutes also included lesbian relationships is not known. Very little is recorded about homosexual relationships at all, male or female, so there were either few relationships of this nature or they were literally unmentionable" (306-07). In the flash press, at least, there is little to suggest that lesbianism was common among prostitutes, and the comments about "she-males" serve to attack the women's bodies, classes, and ethnicities more than their sexual orientation.

> That infamous strumpet Hal Grandy has again been disgracing our city with her conduct...She thinks nothing of Promenading Broadway in open day in men's apparel, or of jostling respectable females from the side-walks. It was only the other day that she boldly walked into a hair-dresser's shop in Park Row, and grossly insulted a gentleman…She is the same prostitute who cow-hided in open day a young man, who at the same time shared her affections with a host of lawless fellows, but who chastised her severely for it on the spot, the marks of which she will carry to her grave. We would give the world to meet her in the street in any other appearance than that of a she-male ("Scandalous").

The emphasis is less on Grandy's femininity and more on her ambiguous presentation of gender. Grandy's failure is not in the ring, but in her gender performance. Violence is inflicted on her body for the sexual promiscuity required of her occupation. She fails to present an intelligible body, one that is clearly female and chaste, and which will bear the physical marks of violence forever because of that failure. The heterosexual nature of her work is not enough to make her body legible to readers as female. And perhaps the promiscuity required of her occupation actually counters the notion that she is feminine. The men's apparel and aggressive nature she possesses place Grandy out of sync with the femininity and heterosexual narratives of this historical moment. Judith Butler notes that, "As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation, as Beauvoir claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" ("Performative Acts" 404). In the perception of Grandy's gender performativity we locate a moment of unrecognizability,

and in the response to that indecipherable identity, the force of the normative becomes obvious. Despite being chastised, Hal Grandy did not alter her performance of gender; instead, she stepped into the boxing ring.

The boxing ring has for so long been associated with masculinity that one might assume women boxers in antebellum America are simply considered masculine. They are, after all, engaging in an aggressive, physically tiring, violent sport—qualities distinct from those that Victorian women were expected to possess. That is just not the case, though. There is no clear binary that says prostitutes who box are either masculine or feminine, and when it seems that the editors are attempting to show boxers classified strictly in one way or another, that balance is usually upset. As Bakhtin notes about bodies in his conception of the carnivalesque, there is a transgressive and always-in-motion quality to bodies in this literary space. Boxing women are neither simply masculine nor feminine; they are a grotesque sight, not closed or completed, but transgressing corporeal boundaries, as well as social ones:

> [T]he grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or

> defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other (Bakhtin 26).

Within the confines of these boxing articles, the paper's authors focus on the physical features of the prostitutes—particularly their noses, their skin, their bodily fluids, their genitals, their breasts, and their hair. When fighting, the women are grotesque, but not inferior to their opponents. That grotesqueness is accepted, and sometimes even admired, within the ring's boundaries and the article's boundaries on the page.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the way that boxing prostitutes are looked at as grotesque, the articles about female boxers often try to take the women somewhat seriously as athletes, describing the rounds, the awareness of technique, and the skills exhibited. While the authors still mock the prize fights in many ways, they do not simply parody or masculinize the women. In fact, ambiguity of female boxers' bodies is the rule rather than the exception. At times, there exists an unease in the flash press about female boxers. This unease tends to manifest itself in a hyper-focus on sexualizing their bodies. Here, the *Sunday Flash* describes an athlete in ways that conjure images of the strip tease:

> [She] stripped off her cumbrous outer garment, disclosing by an act, a form of the most angelic proportions clothed in a rich satin tunic, which glittered with spangles and precious stones. Her legs, which were of the most voluptuous mould [sic] imaginable, were enclosed in the finest silk hose, and an orange colored slipper with a variegated rosette, covered with a glowing carbuncle, covered the neatest foot under the sun" ("Romantic Race").

However much the bodies of prostitutes are sexualized through athletic activity, the women themselves continue to engage in physical culture. There is not a hesitance to participate in future boxing matches or foot races. Conversely, it is men who, literally, hold women back to prevent them from accepting the challenge to a prize fight. A December 1841 article in *The Flash* depicts this obstruction: "[Ellen] Sewell appeared nearly as well as at first and, without waiting to readjust her apparel, offered to take the fight out of any man present for five dollars; but there were no takers. Harriet Grundy did show some signs of uneasiness; but, as the challenge only extended to men, *she was restrained by her fancy man Ginger Blue*" ("Sporting Intelligence," emphasis mine). It seems that the men in the flash weeklies, like Ginger Blue, displayed more unease about boxing women and a subversion of typical gender roles than the women written about did.

The women of the flash press shrug off restraints and refuse docility; instead, their performative athleticism begins to ever so slightly rewrite the conditions in which they inhabit the ring. Susan Bordo writes that "Through the pursuit of an everchanging, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity…female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, improvement" (91). The women who make up the pages of the flash press are shown attempting to resist this docility. They eschew the pursuit of ideal Victorian femininity and as a result, they avoid experiencing the same degree of lack and insufficiency.

On the surface, boxing challenges submissiveness. Boxers must be able to attack and throw punches, as well as to absorb blows in efforts to tire out one's opponent.

Assuming punches is not enough, though. If a boxer is not willing or capable of throwing a jab, hook, or cross in return, she will never down her rival. Additionally, women of the flash press, like Hal Grandy and Nance Kemp, challenge becoming docile bodies through their engagement with physical activity more generally. The act of boxing, while no less a performance of gender than putting on a corset and sitting passively, begins to change the script ever so slightly. As Butler points out, there is no way out of gender or its performance, but it is possible to create conditions for bodies to inhabit space differently. The performative parameters of gender can be slowly molded with each repetition. That is precisely what the athletic performances of these boxers do. With enough repetition of boxing matches, notions about what femininity and athleticism are shift over time. For instance, every time Hal Grandy steps into a ring and is called a "she-male," both "she" and "male" take on slightly different meanings than they did before they were applied to Grandy. Neither word is as clearly distinct from the other in meaning as it was before it was applied to Hal's physical exertion. Gradually, performance of both 'she' and 'male' will change slightly. Grandy heightens a productive ambivalence with her performance, to borrow a term from Homi Bhabha. As Bhabha says, "The discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence;* in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (qtd. In Elam, Jr. 289). When gender norms and codes are reproduced, there is always room for slippage in subject formation. Slippage as a term to think about the productive possibilities of gender performance is especially apt here. One important move that a boxer must be familiar with is a 'slip.' This technique requires that a boxer move her head as a defensive technique to avoid getting hit. In many ways, the women boxers of the flash press are performing a 'slip,'

avoiding static performances of gender and instead embracing that productive ambivalence.

The temptation to impose taxonomies on these boxers and place them firmly into a camp—sexual and feminine or muscular and masculine—is strong; however, Judith Halberstam's concept of "female masculinity" offers us a more productive way to think about their embodiment. Her model of female masculinity as "a multiplicity of masculinities" leaves room to acknowledge both the sexual nature of the women outside the ring and the lust for competition and violence in the ring. For Halberstam, masculinity is a construction most "legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white, male, middle-class body. Arguments about excessive masculinity tend to focus on black bodies (male and female), latino/a bodies, or working-class bodies, and insufficient masculinity is all too often figured by Asian bodies or upper-class bodies" (*Female* 2). Put another way, masculinity is not an expression of maleness, despite the tendency to think of it a "natural gender itself" (*Female* 4). Here, Halberstam nods to the James Bond movies to convey her argument. Bond's masculinity is prosthetic in nature, dependent upon all of his flashy gadgets. It is instead his female boss, M, who most embodies masculinity. Halberstam contends that male masculinity cannot be understood until female masculinity is also examined at length. Female masculinity "exposes the workings of dominant heterosexual masculinity" (*Female* 4). Though Halberstam discusses contemporary culture, this dynamic relationship can also be found in the flash weeklies, creating an ideal of libertine masculinity through the masculinized women competing in these bouts.

Let's take Hal Grandy as an example of how we might use female masculinity in productive ways when examining the flash papers. In "Grand Pitch Between Harriet Grandy and the Gingerbread Man" the reporter sets the scene for the reader:

> This most extraordinary battle originated from Harriet's custom of calling her paramour, the Gingerbread-man, by the familiar sobriquet of *Gingerballs*; which title he on several occasions has expressed his marked dislike to, and the very night in question forbade that it should be again applied to him on pain of his displeasure. Notwithstanding this positive injunction, Harriet, who is as untameable as a Ukraine steed, and as uncontrollable as an Hyrcaniau Tigress, assaulted the in-offencive [sic] Ginger with his title as soon as he entered the house; upon which, he very properly knocked her down. At this, her rage knew no bounds, and determined to be even with him she dared him to single combat on the spot. Nothing loth, Ginger accepted, and the yard was cleared for the encounter ("Grand Pitch").

Here, Grandy maintains a position of power in the dynamic between herself and the Gingerbread-man. The Gingerbread-man's displeasure with his nickname suggests that he understands that "the fixity conferred by names also traps people into many different identities, racial as well as gendered" (Halberstam, *Female* 8). In this case, he is linked indefinitely with a name that alludes to his Irish identity, aligns him with blackness, recalls the "gentle" meaning of the word ginger, and proves his masculinity to be a construct.[19] His genitalia are deemed inoffensive, he is reduced to a single body part—his testes—, and it is clear that Grandy is mocking his sexual prowess. In this moment, the

[19] Of note is one *OED* definition of "ginger," which has also been used historically to refer to "A cock with reddish-brown plumage; (formerly) spec. one used for fighting." This particular definition seems apt here, considering the pugilistic setting in which the reader finds the Gingerbread Man.

Gingerbread-man's attempts to turn Grandy into a docile body, by "knocking her down," prove ineffectual, as she is full of rage and "uncontrollable." Rather, his "inoffensive" nature is more closely aligned with docility. Grandy asserts her desire "to be even with him" and challenges him to what would otherwise have been considered a man's sport, embodying a female masculinity that allows her to inhabit female and masculine-associated spaces (a heteronormative sexual relationship and a violent boxing ring).

Female masculinity is most apparent in the flash press when boxing prostitutes are in the ring with men as their opponents. Men are consistently described in ways that show the women physically overpowering them in the ring and commanding them to behave in certain ways outside of the ring. The assertiveness and strength so closely attached to masculinity are present in these moments—they just happen to be located in the women, ascribing to them a female masculinity. For instance, *The Flash* describes a match between Ellen Sewell and Jem Jeroloman in which Sewell is clearly the more masculine of the two. Sewell, "who is almost as big as Jem, and has always boasted of being too much for him, thereupon sent him a challenge to fight… in Mrs. Willoughby's front parlor" ("Sporting Intelligence"). Not only is Sewell positioned as the stronger and more virile of the two, but the roles of their sexual relationship are also reversed. As the reporter describes, "For want of better and honest occupation, Jem and his pal, LaRue, have of late, been in the employ of Ellen, Harriet Grundy, and others…Their business is to attend the ladies at balls, sleigh rides, &c. and to figure either as bullies or husbands, as circumstances may require."[20] Sewell fulfills the role typically associated with

[20] Here, I contend that "bullies" are distinct from pimps. As Marilynn Wood Hill notes of nineteenth-century pimps, "If a man depended on a prostitute for more than temporary support, he might be thought of as a pimp, but the use of the term can be very misleading when referring to the nineteenth century before 1870. Pimps, as they are known today and have been known since the last decades of the nineteenth

masculinity while Jem is more akin to the role of the prostitute here, his sexual services for hire and available for multiple women. After the match is set, Sewell's female masculinity embodies the multiplicities that Halberstam describes: "At half past seven Ellen entered the Arena, looking things unutterable and leaning upon the arm of George B. Woolredge, whom she dragged after her much as a man of war drags her jolly boat. La Rue held up her train, which was unnecessary as it was already too short so short, indeed, as to expose more than Celeste or Fanny Ellsler ever do." Here she is clearly the more assertive of her and Woolredge; simultaneously, her femaleness—her visible female body—is impossible to ignore.

As the fight begins, Ellen is the faster, more aggressive boxer, throwing more punches and outmaneuvering Jem. Ellen's offensive tactic aligns closely with what Halberstam observes about female boxers:

> The boxing strategy of 'taking it like a man' is not a favored strategy for the masculine woman; she is much more likely to transform the mechanisms of masculinity and produce new constellations of embodiment, power, and desire. She is more likely, furthermore, to give than to take…Cut off from the most obvious rewards of masculinity—political power and representation—many masculine women…had to imaginatively recreate masculinity through writing and other forms of cultural production (*Female* 276).

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century, can be defined as men who exploit prostitutes financially, living off their earnings, and who have control over the women's public and private sexual lives. Pimps may or may not be the recipients of a prostitute's affection and gifts. Some men who related to prostitutes as pimps existed in nineteenth-century New York, just as they must have existed in all ages. In New York City, however, it was not until around 1870, when prostitution began to be more segregated in red-light districts, that evidence of the presence of pimps becomes clear. Furthermore, not until the last decades of the century did a full-fledged pimp system develop in New York, as males gained control over the complete range of citywide prostitution operations. The distinction between a lover and pimp basically involved whether the woman or the man was primarily in control of both the personal and professional ties. Clearly, up until the last decades of the nineteenth century, women were in charge of the operation and profits of prostitution" (267-68).

Ellen does just this; she attempts an offensive fighting style, running in to give hard blows and ignoring the need to parry, or block punches. She produces a new form of embodied female masculinity in the ring, one that sees her publicly demonstrating her endurance while also displaying her female body (representing her sexual endurance). It will not award her political power or representation, but proving her sexual endurance will help to support her business and increase her finances.

That Ellen Sewell's female masculinity exposes Jem Jeroloman's less potent masculinity is exactly the point. The anxieties surrounding gender identity and sexual representation are only more apparent in the flash press when we begin to closely examine bodily contamination within the ring. Within the weeklies female pugilists and the unclear boundaries of their bodies are represented as grotesque. As Cixous writes, the grotesque female body is "without beginning and without end" (qtd. in Russo 221). It is open, protruding, leaking, and in flux, much like the bodies of boxing prostitutes. Female pugilists blur "boundaries between individuals and society, between genders…and between classes;" their grotesque bodies evoke a fear of seepage (Russo 78). The ways that boxers' blood and sweat are written about speak to a fear of "contaminated" gender identities in the flash press. Both Elizabeth Grosz and Julia Kristeva consider this seepage and contamination in their discussions of abjection. As Kristeva defines it, the abject is a reaction (sometimes physical, like vomit) to a breakdown and loss of distinction between self and other, subject and object (2-4). For the men and women written about in the flash press, the boxing ring represents the ultimate breakdown of that distinction. Not only are many of the men sexually involved with the women they fight, representing the blurring of bodily barriers, but in the press, there is also a "pollution" of

bodies. Boxing is a violent, gory sport. And that violence manifests in blood, sweat, mangled flesh, and cuts. Those bodily fluids and gaping wounds are not static. They don't remain in place or disappear. Rather, they seep and ooze and spread. I posit that the emphasis on bodily fluids in boxing articles in publications like *The Flash* represent a fear that the body is porous, and thus that the Other's masculinity is indistinguishable from one's own. As Grosz notes:

> Bodily fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what death implies), to the perilous division between the body's inside and its outside. They affront a subject's aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity. They attest to a certain irreducible 'dirt' or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body, a testimony of the fraudulence or impossibility of the 'clean' and 'proper' (193).

If one cannot contain the demarcations of his body from another's, how can his identity remain stable? The writers at the flash weeklies communicate an unease about the ways that blood and sweat transference complicates gender identity in the ring, as well as outside of it.

The flash press tends to treat female bodily fluids differently than it does blood and fluid drawn during men's boxing matches, showing that the carnivalesque leveling of social and bodily differences in the ring is merely fleeting. The recognition of who draws first blood is a convention of most boxing articles, but the ways in which the flash press deals with blood and gender varies. In *The Flash*, for instance, Hal Grandy's fight with the Gingerbread-Man focuses closely on the way the Grandy draws blood from her

opponent. The reporter observes that, "Hal worked up gradually, let fly and caught her opponent upon his gingersnap box, and started the claret (cries of first blood for Hal from the stoop)" Shortly thereafter she "rushed in, closed, and seizing him by the shirt, stripped it into ribbands, while at the same time she industriously bit his ear (cries of 'foul!' from the stoop and 'Time' from Julia Brown)." Not yet finished, Hal "scratched at Ginger's face open-handed, and drew blood from his mouth (cries of 'she's gouging him' and exclamation of disgust)." In each moment during the match, Grandy draws blood from, or even bites, Gingerblue. And the crowd reacts with disgust and unease each time this happens, shouting that "she's gouging him" ("Grand Pitch").

On the surface, these descriptions seem to be no more than those of a match that is violent by nature and a crowd that is policing the rules and conventions of the sport. However, the anxiety about blood and saliva's transferability from one body to another is specific to articles in which women box men. When Becky Powell fights with Peanut, she draws first blood: "First blood and first knockdown blow for Beck. At the close of the sixth round, Peanut, entirely bungled up, cried enough, and would not come to time" ("Grand Flare Up"). There is no congratulation to Becky here, but instead Peanut's refusal to continue and his desire to separate himself from the match quickly. In "Match Race Around the Park Between Dutch Lize and the Great Western," an article about female athletes, a fight breaks out. It does not last long, though: "After the exchange of a few blows it was stopped by the interference of Sucker Joe, *who cannot bear to see a blow struck or blood drawn, much less take part in an affray himself*" (emphasis mine). There exists an obvious threat to the men in these accounts in the form of seeping liquids.

Sucker Joe is so averse to contamination that he will not even partake in fights himself, so as not to put his own body and gender identity at risk.

In articles that depict either two women or two men boxing one another, the mentions of bodily fluids are more mundane and there are fewer cries of 'foul' or disgust from the crowd. When blood is mentioned in matches between women the response seems to be largely congratulatory. Kate Davis, for instance, draws first blood during her match with Nance Kemp, and exclamations of "good rally" and "'Bravo, Kate you're a good 'un,'" follow. In "Great Fight Between Johnny Walker and Ned Adams" the mention of blood is passed over quickly: "Walker drew the first blood in the 4th Round. In the 41st Round Adams' friend saw he had no chance, and wished him to give in, but the game fellow would not." An August 6, 1842 issue of *The Whip* reinforces the dispassionate way that blood gets mentioned when both fighters are men: "Seventy rounds were fought. The following are the principal occurrences as reported: The first round…was distinguished by mutual dodging, in which both were on the alert, and stopped and got away with scientific precision. Each hit short, but at last, Jones got home with his left, catching the Greek on the 'praty box,' and drawing first blood." The article continues on to say that, "In the 22d round Jones hit the Greek down with his left, thus winning first blood and first knock down. In 23d round, after a desperate rally, Jones seized his man round the body, flung him heavily and fell upon him ("Great Fight Between Bill Jones"). Notably, matches between two men are less narrativized than those describing matches involving one or more women. When first blood, or any fluids, are mentioned in the latter, a story is told about the response to those liquids, the melee that

follows, and the jeers of the crowd. When blood is mentioned in men's matches, it is merely a point noted alongside other details of the match and then moved past.

I contend that the attention to and the anxiety about the mingling of bodily fluids between men and women in these accounts speaks to a recognition of how one subsumes or becomes the Other through bodily contamination. In this case, there is a concern about the clouding of gender roles. Elizabeth Grosz notes that "each of the sexes can pose a threat to the other, a threat that is located in the polluting powers of the other's body fluids. This may prove a particularly significant site for an analysis of sexual difference in the era where sexuality has become reinvested with notions of contagion and death, of danger and purity" (193-95). The women in these accounts already possess a female masculinity that reveals the ways masculinity operates or fails for men in the ring. If female boxers find themselves in contact with men's blood or sweat during a match, the implication is that they've been successful enough in the fight to draw blood and tire out their opponent. Aggressiveness, speed, endurance, strength, physical dominance, and skill have long been defined as masculine traits. Halberstam shows that the only way "to extend such attributes to women…is not simply to make them 'human' but to allow them to extend to women as masculinity" (*Female* 272). Showing boxers in possession of female masculinity, though, was viewed as a threat to the men written about in a paper meant to fortify a heteronormative subculture that venerates the sexually successful man. A clash of equals did not sit well with male editors and readers. However, the exchange of bodily fluids outside of the ring, during sexual relationships with the prostitutes, does not seem to elicit the same anxiety because it does not subvert gender subordination or heteronormativity.

Conversely, there is the possibility that men will somehow embody a more effeminate identity if they cannot separate themselves from the bodily fluids of the Other in the ring. Because to bleed means that the skin has been pierced, men carry those wounds and etchings on the flesh after the match. While blood flow stops quickly, the bodily inscriptions that denote blood flow remain, announcing to the world that the boxer is more than just himself—his male body has been marked by female masculinity. Notably, in many cases, men leave with their female opponents after the fights to engage in a sexual relationship. The impulse here is to reinforce one's gender identity, again through the merging of bodily fluids, but within a heteronormative context. As Halberstam observes, "Men seem to refuse to believe that *their* body fluids are the 'contaminants.' It must be women who are the contaminants" (*Female* 197). She continues on to say that the differentiation between a "clean" and "unclean" woman "does not come from any presumption about the inherent polluting properties of the self-enclosure of female sexuality…but is a function of the quantity, and to a lesser extent the quality, of the men she has already been with. So she is in fact regarded as a kind of sponge or conduit of *other men's dirt*" (*Female* 197). Any engagement in a sexual relationship with a female prostitute does not mark the man as dirty, contaminated, or less masculine as an encounter with her bodily fluids in the ring would (unless, of course, one of the people involved in the sexual encounter is not white). Instead, the woman involved in that sexual exchange assumes all the "dirt." As I have stated elsewhere, the articles about female boxers that appear in the weeklies are not simply mocking in tone, though they are not completely devoid of ridicule towards the women. But, the pieces become far more interesting when used to reveal the fractures in the weeklies, uncloaking a real fear

of female masculinity and its messiness that satirical male bravado attempts (sometimes unsuccessfully) to obfuscate.

Conclusion

An 1851 lithograph (see fig. 2.1) by J.L. Magee portraying a "great bloomer prize fight," though not between prostitutes, depicts the ways that women's boxing evolved throughout the nineteenth century, as well as the ways that it remained stagnant. As papers began to publish accounts of female pugilists more often and more consistently, their involvement in the sport was taken (slightly) more seriously. The mocking tone that the flash weeklies assumed when covering the matches slowly lessened over the later decades of the nineteenth century. Figure 1 depicts two women engaged in a prize fight, looked upon by a crowd of men. They both seem to be middle-class women, based on their dress and neat presentation. The woman on the left is ready in her boxing stance, as her bottleholder hands her what is presumably the champion's belt. The woman on the right sits on the lap of her bottleholder, covering her eyes, likely upset about her defeat. This image fits into a genre of boxing lithographs that show two (male) boxers in their fighting stances, ready to come to blows. They are always shown in a ring, surrounded by (male) onlookers, and shadowed by their bottleholders at the corners of the ropes. Each of these lithographs is titled in the same font that is used here, and each title is usually a variation of "the prize fight." The placement of women in this tradition of boxing lithographs seems, on the surface, to suggest that boxing has begun to openly accept women between the ropes. Upon closer inspection, though, the "bloomers" in the

Figure 2.1, J.L. Magee's 1851 "The Great Bloomer Prize Fight"

lithograph represent the struggles authors and artists deal with during the mid-nineteenth century regarding female embodiment.

While this lithograph draws on many of the conventions of other similar prints depicting male boxers, it also illustrates that women engaged in athletics were still subject to the male gaze. The most obvious example of this is the all-male audience that watches the match. No longer is there a supportive female community to cheer on the boxers, as there was amongst boxing prostitutes. The femaleness of these two boxers stands out when they are the only two women shown in the print. Their clothing emphasizes their female bodies—coiffed hair, dainty feet, thin waists, ample breasts—and minimizes any muscular features. The women are both sexualized and infantilized in this lithograph. The boxer on the left is wearing a shirt so tight that her nipples are exposed, while the pugilist on the right is sitting on a man's lap as a child would, and seeking comfort in her defeat. They are at odds with one another, one embracing her strength and the other turning away from it.

I end with this image because it gestures to the ways that authors in the years leading up to the Civil War took up female athleticism in their writing. As I will discuss in the next chapter, women's athleticism is only able to exist and function in certain settings and genres. As middle-class girls become women, they tend to lose their athleticism. In Figure 1, the lithographer, Magee, shows the more infantile of the women shielding her face, as if to suggest that the ring is too much for her. She is not standing in an active pose or showing her muscles. There is little to suggest movement or athleticism from her, aside from her placement within a ring, and the man whose lap she sits on holds up his hand in a halting gesture. The fighter on the right side of the print is certainly more

active in her pose, but still sexualized. It as if McGee is illustrating the competing tensions that authors would attempt to work through in the years to come: the sexualization and boundary-pushing of female athletes versus the stagnation and inactivity demanded of them by society. This tension eventually manifests in the fight between domestic fiction and sensational literature. Here, that fight is literally playing out between acceptable female athleticism and its curtailment by others. As female athleticism begins to move from the periphery to the center, it is taken up by authors of fiction and written about in more widely-read genres than the flash press.

CHAPTER 3

BLUESTOCKINGS, TOMBOYS, AND LITERARY AMAZONS IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the mid-nineteenth century, Amazon marches became popular performances in the United States. These performances featured physically fit women and recalled the Amazons of Greek mythology (see fig. 3.1). Amazons were strong, athletic, fierce, warrior women who were sometimes depicted living on islands without men and training their bodies for battles. Atalanta, famous for her speed and wrestling abilities, represents the physical abilities of Amazons. Greek mythology says that she hunted and killed a boar that no man could and then challenged any man who wished to marry her to beat her in a foot race. Hippomenes was only able to win with enchanted golden apples and trickery. She outran (and then killed) every other opponent (Mayor 2-3). Though the women involved conjure associations with ancient Greek Amazons, nineteenth-century Amazon marches were modeled on Zouave marches, military-style drills that the French saw in Algeria and then appropriated for their own (racialized) entertainment. "Zouave Cadet" acts began to appear in the United States and maintained their popularity through the 1860s and 1870s (McAfee 27).

Amazon marches contained all of the athleticism of the male version of this spectacle, but with an increased gaze on the bodies of the participants. An 1861 article in the *Daily Intelligencer* posed the question, "What is a Zouave?" The response was that a Zouave is "a fellow who can pull up a hundred and ten pound dumbbell; who can climb

Figure 3.1, “Kiralfy Bros ‘Black Crook’” by Forbes Co et al.

up an eighty foot rope, hand over hand, with a barrel of flour hanging to his heels…A fellow who can jump seventeen feet four inches high without a spring board -- that is a Zouave" ("What Is A Zouave?"). The women in Amazon marches embodied many of these same physical qualities. They involved troupes of muscular women, dressed as warriors, who paraded in unison and exuded strength. The performances were anchored in martial arts and the women typically wore Zouave-inspired uniforms—loose pantaloons, an embroidered jacket, a sash, and a fez (McAfee 12-13).

The Black Crook, Charles Barras's 1866 musical at Niblo's Theater, was certainly swept up by these marches. William Wheatley, the manager at Niblo's, did not want to lose audience interest during the play's long set changes, and decided to include the marches as filler entertainment (Monod 166). Before long, the song "March of the Amazons" was added to the play and stage directions called for "Amazons with breast plates, helmets, shields and Javelins" to march behind the fierce warrior character, Stalacta (3.1). Amazon marches like the one in *The Black Crook* graced theaters across the United States in large numbers during the 1860s. These "colossal displays" became larger and more sprawling as time went on, and audiences continued to be mesmerized by the display of Amazonian women on stage (Rubin 22).

Amazon marches are deeply connected to the display of fit female bodies at the same time that they are wrapped up in minstrelsy and racial appropriation. These marches put strong female bodies on display for onlookers, as David Monod notes. He writes that "the Amazon march is really nothing but a walk around…The main thing, you see, is shape. All they have to do is to put on their costumes and let the jays look at them…Female minstrelsy—essentially a variety entertainment organized in three parts

with a Tambo and a Bones—was really about looking at women (221). Here, Monod points to the objectification of the fit female body, but he also puts that body in conversation with Tambo and Bones, two minstrel show performers from the nineteenth century. By appropriating the uniform of the Zouave regiments from Algeria during their shows, the Amazonian women partook in multiple masquerades. They exhibited their own athletic bodies while wearing uniforms aligned with flamboyance and exoticism. Gender lines became blurred for both men and women who wore the Zouave pantaloons—these pants are billowy enough to resemble a skirt but are still pants at their core. At the same time that gender became less distinct for Zouave performers, racial identity also blurred for women in Amazon marches. They donned traditional African outfits that aligned them with tribalism and a kind of minstrelsy, one that is different from black minstrel shows in America, but that foreshadowed the ways that tomboys perform racial masquerades in literature.

America's mania for Amazons on stage bled into the literary world in the mid-nineteenth century. Women writers and their characters were labeled Amazons, as I will show shortly, and one figure that occupied the pages of popular novels and stories encapsulated the athleticism and warrior potential of Amazons—the tomboy. The tomboy reveled in a display of her muscular body and participated in identity performances just as the women in Amazon marches did. Adrienne Mayor makes a point about ancient Greek women "going Amazon" that is also applicable for nineteenth-century tomboys. Mayor says that "going Amazon" "was an option for girls who had been raised since childhood to ride horses and shoot arrows" (11). When nineteenth-century tomboys "go Amazon" they are exercising their athleticism but doing so in such a way that makes

them tribal. To "go Amazon" suggests that they shed many forms of civilized behavior and revert to a primitive way of being. In nineteenth-century American literature, however, for most tomboys to grow out of their "primitive" phase and enter "civilization" they must either shed that athleticism or capitulate to heteronormative gender roles. Once they mature out of tomboyism, they are no longer Amazons, no longer connected to masquerade.

For E.D.E.N. Southworth, one of the best-selling authors of the century, sensational story papers allow characters to maintain their athleticism at novel's end, despite entrances into marriage. For instance, *The Hidden Hand's* (1859) Capitola Black demonstrates that authorship—whether attained by writing fiction or public performance—enables gender-bending through athleticism. Conversely, Louisa May Alcott, another best-selling author from the time, could not allow her tomboys to remain in their "primitive" phase and still pursue the feminine plots of domestic fiction. In *Little Women* (1869), for instance, Jo March remains an athletic tomboy until she marries Professor Bhaer and decides to forgo writing sensational stories for moral, domestic fiction. Alcott curtails Jo's self-display as athletic body and writer in the name of marriage and maternity.

I posit that it is the performative aspects of athletic tomboyism—and the anxiety stemming from those—that make necessary their evacuation from juvenile and domestic fiction. Domestic literature promoted heteronormative gender roles to the white, middle-class youth of America. Female athleticism does not often adhere to heteronormative gender roles for women, and it presents as performance. Tomboys can embody their roles as athletes when advantageous and shed them when needed, which raised questions about

what boundaries could be crossed if that performance was successful; suddenly, racial, gender, and class lines were all at risk of violation. Story papers, on the other hand, make few claims of realism or education. Sensational literature is already linked to performance and masquerade, so the potential construction and malleability of athletic identity is seen as a lesser threat within this genre. Ultimately, this chapter works to answer the question, what happens when physical performance cultures enter narratives?

Capitola Black and Jo March, the tomboys who I consider most closely, reveal the links between authorship and athletic embodiment through the ways that they manage their own fit bodies and construct their identities. This athletic performativity allows them to take command of a public stage, question limits of feminine roles, and even engage in a form of racial masquerade. As Michelle Abate has noted, the tomboy code of conduct is also a "racialized construct," one in which both Jo and Capitola participate (xii). I turn to Southworth first and consider how the sensational *Hidden Hand* promotes Capitola's performances. Alcott was influenced by Southworth, and Jo retains Capitola's physical vigor within Alcott's sentimental, domestic novel until she ages out of her appropriate Amazon phase. Despite the eventual evacuation of her athleticism, Jo demonstrates how advantageous athletic performativity is for women to traverse social boundaries. She shows us that there is a space within the domestic novel for Amazons to push the limits of femininity, and she gently encourages other women to do the same. Last, I consider stage adaptations of both *The Hidden Hand* and *Little Women.* I explore how Capitola and Jo's athletic bodies function when placed on a stage in front of an audience, a very different space from the pages of a novel. Stage performances of Jo's body, which is cast as unathletic and sickly in adaptations of *Little Women*, take the

bodily restrictions she experiences in the novel to the extreme. Jo's peculiar lack of athleticism on the stage reassures audiences that she has relinquished her membership with her Amazonian tomboy tribe; the closest association she has to them now is the shared stage space of the Amazon marches. Conversely, in this performative space, Capitola's body asserts its power and exaggerates gender and racial masquerades to a great degree than in the novel.

Women as Literary Amazons

In 1857 Fanny Fern published a collection of short stories, *Fresh Leaves*, which generally garnered positive reviews. However, one review in the *New York Ledger* sticks out for the ways that it depicts Fern as a hardened, athletic woman rather than a docile authoress: "We have never seen Fanny Fern, nor do we desire to do so. We imagine her, from her writings, to be a muscular, black-browed, grenadier-looking, female, who would be more at home in a boxing gallery than in a parlor,—a vociferous, demonstrative, strong-minded horror,—a woman only by virtue of her dress. Bah!" ("Review"). At the time this review was written—1857—Fern's pugilism is linked to gendered *and* classed implications. The attitudes in this review towards women writers are not exceptional or out of the ordinary for the time. There was a tension prevalent in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century between women's careers as writers and their abilities to maintain domestic roles within the home. Critiques like the one above often focused on the bodies and personal attributes of female authors rather than on their writing. By describing women writers' physical traits, critics set up a false dichotomy—women could either be masculine and athletic writers or feminine mothers and housewives.

What is different about this review is the fact that Fern herself wrote it as parody. She understood the criticisms leveled at women writers during the time and attempts to dispel them here through satire and humor. This doubleness is itself a facet of athletic performativity—a self-reflexive dramatization of the spectacular woman's body. In Fern's review, her attention to musculature and other athletic features reinforces the connections between female authorship and athleticism. She later declares:

> The very fact that Fanny Fern has, in the language of her admirers, 'elbowed her way through unheard of difficulties,' shows that she is an antagonistic, pugilistic female. One must needs, forsooth, get out of her way, or be pushed [to] one side, or trampled down. How much more womanly to have allowed herself to be doubled up by adversity, and quietly laid away on the shelf of fate, than to have rolled up her sleeves, and gone to fisticuffs with it. Such a woman may conquer, it is true, but her victory will cost her ("Review").

Fern's review calls attention to the embodied nature of writing as well as the conflation of author and text. Women writers were taken as one with their text, bodies of text linked to actual bodies. The act of writing is seen as a defiant attack on gender roles and therefore women writers must occupy "pugilistic" and muscular bodies. Their action—writing—in addition to the content of the writing, dictates how their bodies are formed, at least in the eyes of critics.

Less obvious in this review, however, is Fern's acknowledgment of identity markers and performance—"a woman only by virtue of her dress." The suggestion here is that athleticism allows for a malleable gender identification and that dress, musculature, and participation within the physical fitness arena can obfuscate one's gender. That

masquerade facilitates entrance into a public sphere and career that was previously difficult to obtain. The aggression that can be read on Fern's body nearly eclipses other markers of her womanliness. Had she chosen different clothes or constructed a different appearance, Fern may not have been at all identifiable to reviewers as a woman. In other words, Fern illustrates the performative qualities of athleticism and authorship that both unsettle the feminine identification that even the moniker "Fanny Fern" seems to underscore. At the same moment that the sentimental woman writer seems to make a profession of her gender, she also insists that this heavy lifting makes her more masculine—or perhaps even frees her from abiding by a single cultural script.

Fern's review is representative of a growing trend in works by women authors at mid-century: the use of athletic language to discuss themselves and the act of writing. Many authors linked the ability to enter the profession to strength of body. For instance, when Winnie Woodfern's best-known character, Hero Strong, discusses her dream to be a successful writer, she holds out her hand and proclaims that her muscles are, "strong as iron" (qtd. in Cohen 392). Other women writers frequently refer to themselves and are referred to as "literary Amazons." While many Americans likely meant "Amazon" as an insult, filled with class connotations, women writers took up the phrase in an act of defiance. In "What Shall They Do?" Elizabeth Stuart Phelps responds to a woman who wrote to *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* asking if she should abandon writing. Phelps counsels the letter writer, "Weak-Minded Woman" that "As a general thing, it is next to impossible for a woman with the care of a family on her hands to be a successful writer… It can be done, to be sure; but it needs one or both of two things: the physical strength of an Amazon and the talent of the highest order" ("What Shall They Do?" 519). For Phelps

and a host of other women writers during the mid-nineteenth century, the "physical strength of an Amazon" was integral to successful writing, or at least imbued women with the endurance to weather criticism.

This mock-tribal identification with the Amazons amounts for Susan Wallace, a nineteenth-century author, to a form of racial masquerade. Her white body suffers while she imaginatively identifies with indigenous others in popular genres. Wallace reports that her "long Indian story, 'The Miami Lovers,' "murdered [her] sleep" and she could not eat or soothe her aching body while writing it ("Another Weak-Minded Woman" 794). Perhaps foreshadowing Jo March, Wallace records her husband's disapproval of her sensational "Indian stories" and her own shame about domestic neglect. Tellingly, she also emphasizes that authorship marked her body--"I wore the ink-spot on my finger"—revealing her imperfect whiteness but also amounting to a kind of war paint. Wallace's anecdote demonstrates the ambivalence at the heart of the athletic woman who both wants to ride with the Amazons and also recognizes that this exertion will reshape—and possibly recolor—her body.

In "A Sketch of A Bluestocking" Catherine Maria Sedgwick writes about several sons who are worried that their mother, Mrs. Laight, has befriended a dreaded literary Amazon, Mrs. Rosewell. When Frank Laight finds his brother, Leonard, attempting to read a piece of writing by Mrs. Rosewell to better facilitate conversation with her, Frank rebukes him:

> 'Pshaw! My dear fellow, you are irretrievably lost, if you undertake to meet these literary Amazons on their own ground. The only way to manage them is to talk them down on subjects they know nothing about. Take them *out* of books,

> Leonard, and they are as ignorant as you and I are *in* them…It is too absurd to be afraid of a woman, just because she happens to be a *mannish* writer of reviews' ("A Sketch" 336).

In his response to Leonard, Frank demonstrates his anxieties about both Mrs. Rosewell's bodily presence as well as her knowledge of subjects on which Frank himself admits ignorance. By declaring that he is not comfortable *in* books, he simultaneously, and perhaps unknowingly, realigns traditional gender roles. No longer is Frank the learned man of letters; that becomes Mrs. Rosewell's role. Nor is Frank the strong or muscular character. Mrs. Rosewell is the Amazon, and it is later revealed that Leonard is familiar with sports, but Frank is not. Frank reveals his own fear that that the demarcation between dainty, domestic woman and strong, public man will be crossed by both Leonard and Mrs. Rosewell without realizing that he has already blurred it.

Tomboys in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Alcott's Jo March is one of the best-known tomboy characters in literature, but she is far from the only one. Tomboys populate the long-nineteenth century works of Southworth, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Wilson, Sarah Orne Jewett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Willa Cather, Kate Chopin, and many other authors. Tomboyism, Abate claims, "was created in the mid-nineteenth century" (xxii), coinciding with a growing acceptance of "an alternative and more physically active code of conduct" for women (Cogan 4). Abate acknowledges that the terms tomboy and hoyden have been in use since the sixteenth century, but tomboyism as a defining literary character trait is a more recent invention. But what does it mean to be a tomboy in the mid-nineteenth century? Tomboyism, Lynne Yamaguchi and Karen Barber

astutely note, could be "a virtually uniform picture of a girl who—by whatever standards society has dictated—acts like a boy…but how one defines a 'transgression into boys territory' differs for every individual" (qtd. in Abate xv). Region, race, class standing, and many other factors affect what behaviors one considers tomboyish. For example, a girl who develops her strength may be considered a tomboy in an upper-class home, but for a young working-class woman, this may be common behavior necessary for certain chores. Across the board, however, tomboyism is a "distinct bodily identity" (Abate xxviii). Whether young women are engaging in sport, wearing typically masculine clothes, or foregoing docile behavior, they are authoring their identities while simultaneously being marked as tomboys by others. For the purposes of this chapter, I examine tomboys who have "a proclivity for outdoor play (especially athletics), a feisty independent spirit, and a tendency to don masculine clothing and adopt a boyish nickname," the "traits most Americans are likely to name as constitutive of this code of conduct" (Abate xvi). Tomboys, like Jo, are akin to Amazons, fiercely competing in athletic endeavors and engaging in gender and racial masquerade. Alcott even compares Jo to the best-known Amazon warrior, writing that "Laurie reached the goal first and was quite satisfied with the success of his treatment, for his Atalanta came panting up with flying hair, bright eyes, ruddy cheeks, and no signs of dissatisfaction in her face" (Alcott 142). Jo's alignment with Atalanta connects her to a history of warrior women and Amazon march stage performances. In this chapter I focus most closely on tomboys' athleticism, the ways that tomboys perform their athletic identities for their peers, and how that athleticism functions across sensational and domestic literature.

Tomboys occupy an interesting place in literature because in one sense they stir anxieties about unclear boundaries and shifting identities; on the other hand, tomboyism is seen as a phase during which girls' behavior, while unconventional, is not a true threat to white, heterosexual norms. In fact, tomboyism can sometimes reinforce those norms. For instance, tomboys tend to befriend "sissy" boys in literature (Abate xvi). There is no sexual relationship between the two characters and Abate notes that the two actually end up policing one another's gender transgressions. Tomboys teach their effeminate counterparts how to be adventurous, assertive, and strong-willed, as Jo does in *Little Women* with Laurie (xvii-xviii). When it appears that tomboys may not grow out of this phase at adolescence, they are "tamed" and "broken," at least in certain genres, such as domestic fiction. Judith Halberstam notes that tomboyism "may even be encouraged to the extent that it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of a girl identity. Tomboyism is punished, however, where and when it appears to be the sign of extreme male identification...and where and when it threatens to extend beyond childhood and into adolescence" ("Sissies" 157). In domestic and juvenile literature, tomboys who display few traditionally feminine traits or no desire to adhere to gender norms tend to get married to straight, white, middle-class men by novel's end. If a girl is unwilling or unable to do that, often she suffers in some way. In the *What Katy Did* (1872) series Katy Carr, for example, suffers a back injury and is bedridden for four years, after which she no longer possesses those tomboy qualities. Similarly, in Phelps's *Gypsy Breynton* series (1866-67), Gypsy falls under the influence of a tomboy roommate at school, Jo Courtis, the "hoyden." Gypsy's writing style changes after she and Jo become roommates, her language becoming coarser in letters to her mother. Not long after this change, Gypsy

becomes ill and relinquishes her active lifestyle. The evacuation of tomboyism, and specifically of athleticism, recurs across domestic fiction during the mid-nineteenth century, in large part because athletic, rough-and-tumble tomboy characters cannot properly model appropriate adult feminine behavior for young readers. The lesson relayed to readers instead is that courtship takes the tomboy off the court.

This maturation narrative has as much to do with defending whiteness as it does with recuperating femininity and heterosexuality. Tomboyism was imagined as a preparatory stage for white heteronormativity, rather than a challenge to it: "With its intention to bolster the physical health of the nation's future wives and mothers, tomboyism was also intended to bolster the racial health of whiteness" (Abate 6). In other words, the physical pursuits of tomboys simply worked to prepare and fortify their bodies for reproducing white children.

In addition, Abate argues that tomboys in nineteenth-century literature are associated with minstrelsy and racial performance.[21] Capitola and Jo, for instance, are frequently described with dark features, and Capitola is even mistakenly sold into slavery with her mulatto nurse as a baby. Abate notes that characters like Capitola can shed this blackness at any point—signified by the dilution of her "rebellious blackness by marrying…*Grey*son" (17). The ability to move from blackness to whiteness echoes minstrel shows and white performers in blackface (17). Capitola mimics many of the qualities of a "b'hoy," or a minstrel performer.[22] For instance, we meet her in the Bowery, the birthplace of minstrelsy and she uses b'hoy slang even after moving to Virginia (Abate 19-20). However, she is able to quickly switch to and assert her genteel,

[21] See Abate's chapter on *Little Women* for a discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's character, Topsy, racial masquerade, and the ways that Alcott's "Topsy-Turvy Jo" rebels against white womanhood.
[22] See Eric Lott's *Love and Theft* for further reading on minstrel shows and class.

white womanhood when she interacts with Wool and other black servants, treating them unkindly and with authority. For Abate, tomboyism is inseparable from racial masquerade. Connecting this insight to women's athleticism, I suggest that in sensation fiction, bodily performance provides a source of pleasure, income, and power to the white woman who can take on and cast off her "Black"-ness at will, while in Alcott's domestic fiction, Jo March learns to control and restrict her bodily pleasures, relinquishing her membership in the prepubescent tribe of Amazons and thus recuperating her whiteness.

The Hidden Hand and Capitola Black's Performances

Beginning in the 1850s, E.D.E.N. Southworth published nearly all of her novels serially in Robert Bonner's *New York Ledger*, joining authors like Fanny Fern on the paper's pages, and taking advantage of a growing medium. New print and transportation technologies led to the rise in popularity and mass-circulation of story-papers throughout the country. These publications, slightly different from their penny press predecessors, were eight-page weekly newspapers that costs five or six cents and "contained anywhere from five to eight serialized stories presented in eight columns of closely printed type" (Merish 46). They were sustained by subscriptions, and thus not sold publicly in the same way that penny papers were. Importantly, story-papers were driven largely by fiction, whereas the earlier penny press tended to also focus on news items and politics. The stories themselves—swash-buckling tales of adventure, mystery, scandal, intrigue, horror, and violence—were popular among audiences and often dealt with feats of physical fitness. Henry Nash Smith observes that "antebellum popular literature was overwhelmingly populated by cross-dressing female 'Amazons'…Indeed the salience of the category of the 'tomboy' in nineteenth-century culture was definitively shaped by the

(cross-)gendered forms of fantasy and escape routinely promoted in and by popular literature'" (qtd. in Merish 51). Female athleticism thrived in story-papers, perhaps partly because this fiction was marketed towards working-class readers. Laboring women were certainly thought to be more muscular, strong, and athletic than middle-class women in the nineteenth century by necessity, and stories valorizing athletic women would have appealed to this particular audience (Merish 51-52). Additionally, readers would have recognized that identity in story-papers was constantly being constructed and reconstructed. It was not stagnant and was not meant to be read as realistic or didactic.

In *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth's best-known character, Capitola Black, maintains her physical fitness *and* marries at the end of the novel, illustrating the acceptance tomboys found for their athleticism in sensational literature. From the early pages of *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth alerts the reader to Cap's tomboyism, referring to her as a colt, mentioning her strength, and showing her disguised as a boy. Throughout the text, Capitola consciously carries her body in certain ways and dresses herself specifically to obstruct and change her identity. For instance, she swaps her girl's clothes for a boy's suit and cuts off her hair. Her new boyish identity enables her to carry carpet bags, hold horses, shovel coal, and clean sidewalks; it isn't until she forgets to cut her hair short again that her ruse is discovered (47). While she is not an author in the way that Jo March is, Capitola writes and shapes her own identity constantly. Her success selling penny papers while cloaked as a newsboy aligns her character with the sensational press. When Major Warfield goes to New York to find Cap, he encounters her in disguise as a Bowery Boy. Over the course of just a few pages he calls attention to her "patchwork" identity. On numerous occasions, Warfield speaks to Capitola about her identity: "What

are you laughing at *now*, you miscellaneous assortment of variegated patches?" (34); "you—you—you—perfect prodigy of patches!" (36); "what—what! My newsboy, my saucy little prince of patches, a girl in boy's clothes!!!" (39); "*Girl* is she, sir?—then, demmy, sir! Whether a girl in *boy's* clothes, or *men's* clothes, or *soldier's* clothes, or, *any* clothes, or NO clothes, sir!" (39); "Gentlemen, I have a favor to ask of you—it is that you will altogether drip this case of the boy in girl's clothes—I mean the *girl* in girl's clothes—I declare, I don't know what I mean!" (49); "Now, my lad—pshaw! My lass, I mean, how shall we get you metamorphosed again?" (49). In each instance, Warfield has trouble pinpointing Capitola's gender because she constantly changes her clothing.

Though Capitola is frequently referred to as a New York boy, a patchwork prince, and so on, her athleticism stands on its own in ways that Jo's cannot in *Little Women*. When Jo participates in physical feats, her gender is frequently discussed in the same scene. Her athleticism and desire to identify as a boy are typically conflated. In a foot race with Laurie, Jo declares that "I wish I was a horse, then I could run for miles in this splendid air… but see what a guy it's made me" (Alcott 142). For Capitola, by contrast, her athleticism often remains separate from discussions of her gender identity. For instance, when she first arrives at Hurricane Hall, Capitola learns how to ride a horse and only her abilities and skills are mentioned:

> After dinner Cap, with Wool for a riding-master, took her first lesson in equestrianism. She had the four great requisites for forming a good rider–a well-adapted figure, a fondness for the exercise, perfect fearlessness and presence of mind. She was not once in danger of losing her seat, and during that single afternoon's exercise she made considerable progress in learning to manage her

> steed. Old Hurricane, whom the genial autumn afternoon had tempted out to smoke his pipe in his armchair on the porch, was a pleased spectator of her *performances*, and expressed his opinion that in time she would become the best rider in the neighborhood (Southworth 81, emphasis mine).

Here, the catalog of physical traits seems to deliberately avoid the mention of gender. Capitola's athleticism is more closely aligned with natural ability and acting, as Southworth notes her "performances." Equestrianism is Capitola's sport of choice, and she constantly defies Warfield's wishes and rides her horse off Hurricane Hall's property. Despite her restricted riding grounds, Capitola makes great progress in her abilities: "Capitola had become a skilful [sic] as she had first been a fearless rider. But her rides were confined to the domain between the mountain range and the river; she was forbidden to ford the one or climb the other." Considering her containment, Capitola's biggest concern is her physical fitness, as she declares, "I cannot be mewed up here in the old house and deprived of my afternoon ride!" (110). She recognizes the power of athleticism to open up and expand her world and her opportunities.

As she becomes a stronger rider, Capitola becomes keenly aware of the benefits athleticism grants her and other women. Her riding abilities allow her to escape the sexual predation of Craven LeNoir and her marksmanship skills save her from being outdueled by him. However, the advantages of athletic performativity are nowhere clearer than when Capitola switches places with Clara in an effort to save her from LeNoir. Cap gives Clara her riding gear, dresses herself in Clara's mourning outfit, and scolds Clara for getting sentimental. Then, she counsels Clara on how to move and hold her body, saying, "throw back your head and fling yourself along with a swagger, as if

you didn't care, ahem!" (308). Cap's name, which calls to mind a piece of costumery, suggests that there is something inherently performative about her character, and that her female athleticism can rub off on others. The fact that Clara "readily adopted Capitola's light, springy, swaying walk" to mount a horse shows the ease with which she imitates Cap's athletic identity. It is Clara's athletic ability to ride the horse, quickly wheel it around, and then dismount with speed that allows her to impersonate Capitola. In other words, bodily comportment and athleticism enable Clara's escape, while also serving as an indoctrination of sorts. Clara becomes more Amazon-ish through her imitation of Cap. The racialized component of Amazon performance also remains in this scene; physical fitness enables Clara, who is aligned with whiteness, to escape LeNoir, which means "black" in French. Were Clara unable to ride, she would not have assumed Cap's identity and evaded LeNoir. Masquerade—of race, gender, or class—in this novel is not only accepted, but it becomes an advantageous means of escaping sexual predation for the young women in the novel.

Contrary to domestic fiction, the overt display of female athleticism does not disappear with the close of Southworth's novel. On the eve of her own wedding, Capitola focuses little on the ceremony and more on freeing Black Donald from jail. As a result, while preparing for the ceremony, Capitola suddenly "flew out of the room, summoned her groom, mounted her horse, and rode away" (477). When she reaches the jail cell, Capitola tricks the warden into letting her see Black Donald. Her plan is to give him her horse, Gyp, for his escape, but ultimately, Gyp is left in her stall and Cap's equestrianism remains possible for the foreseeable future. She will not be without her horse and therefore will not have to abandon her riding, even for a short amount of time. Not only

does Capitola remain engaged in athletic activities, but also after her wedding ceremony, the narrator remarks, "And I know for a positive fact that our Cap sometimes gives her 'dear, darling, sweet Herbert,' the benefit of the sharp edge of her tongue, which, of course, he deserves" (485). Cap is not an author in the conventional sense, but at the end of the novel she still retains her voice—the sharp edge of her tongue. Marriage has done little to alter or erase her athleticism, her voice, or her ability to perform multiple roles. Interestingly, Abate notes that many of the men in the novel—Black Donald, Herbert Greyson, Craven LeNoir—all fall in love with Capitola *because* of her tomboyism. They are "impressed by her pluck" and swoon at her "flaming cheeks," for example (12). Not only is Cap able to retain her athleticism after marriage, but it is actually one of the traits that attracts men to her. In some ways, tomboyism enables heteronormativity in this novel. Capitola, unlike Jo March, is allowed to remain athletic because her character is quite open about the performative aspects of her identity. Sensational stories allow for this openness because they are not meant to be realistic or didactic.[23] Put another way, little anxiety arises about the "authenticity" of a character's identity in thrillers or the ability of class, race, and gender performances to go unnoticed precisely because of the level of transparency that sensational stories project regarding performance.

Little Women and Jo's Dwindling Athleticism

Undoubtedly, Alcott was greatly influenced by Southworth's works and her style of writing. Jo March's authorial persona, at least for the first half of *Little Women,* is

[23] Lindsey Traub touches on Alcott's own relationship to sensational fiction: "Conscious control of their visibility gives Alcott's thriller heroines rich opportunities within her inventive and transgressive plotting. However, the kind of exploration of female sexual and social power afforded by the conventions of melodrama and gothic fable was only feasible under the literary conditions peculiar to these genres. The material was established as exotic and the conventions distanced the content from any suggestion of reader emulation or moral sanction. But realism, the ascendant form in nineteenth-century fiction, and middle-class domestic realism in particular could not readily accommodate the sort of fantasies and revelations that Alcott offered in her sensation writing" (158-159).

evidence of that impact. Critics like Nina Baym have pointed to the scene in which Jo sees a boy reading a sensational story by S.L.A.N.G. Northbury as confirmation of this influence: "an allusion so obvious that nobody at the time could have missed it" (Baym xi).[24] When Jo, the character whom Alcott said most closely resembles herself, begins her own quest to write sensational stories, she "[makes] Mrs. Northbury her model" and "rashly [takes] a plunge into the frothy sea of sensational literature" (320). Jo takes Mrs. Northbury as her model in the same way that Alcott took Southworth as hers. Baym argues:

> Since Alcott herself had begun her career by publishing numerous pot-boiling melodramas under an assumed name (melodramas whose authorship remained unknown for many decades), she was obviously both alluding to and disavowing her own past through this critique. But unless one has read *The Hidden Hand,* one cannot realize that Jo March herself, arguably the nation's most famous tomboy heroine--Jo characterizes herself at the novel's outset by bitterly complaining over not being a boy--derives directly from Capitola, heroine of *The Hidden Hand*. This heroine, who enters the novel in boy's clothing and romps through it disrupting numerous expectations for womanly behavior, is not only the first of a long line of tomboy heroines in American fiction, but one of only a few in the nineteenth century who never relinquishes nor apologizes for her tomboy character (Baym xi-xii).

Though Alcott would have liked Jo to remain athletic and tomboyish, as Capitola does, she was aware of the genre in which she was writing and could not allow that to

[24] It is worth noting that *The Hidden Hand* was republished in 1868-69, the same years that Alcott wrote and published *Little Women*. Because of this republication, Southworth's novel would have been at the forefront of conversation and public consciousness once again.

happen.[25] Alcott can only emulate Southworth so much before the limits of different genres are made clear. The conventions of domestic fiction dictated that Jo March, who begins the novel as an athletic, transgressive author, must end the novel writing moral tales and losing her athleticism. Her athletic persona cannot remain in a novel meant to portray demure behaviors to young women. Maintaining her athleticism beyond the acceptable tomboy stage would also threaten gender and racial hierarchies. If Jo was to remain a tomboy, the risk is that she would not adhere to heteronormative marriage. She might instead stay in a state that promotes performance and masquerade, defying expectations of white, middle-class women—docility and submissiveness.

Largely because domestic literature was meant to be more realistic than sensational stories, readers identified with many of the characters in these novels. In *Little Women,* for example, the realism of the story was part of the broad appeal, and readers' eagerness to identify with the March girls exemplifies that. Middle-class girls and women wrote to Alcott constantly, telling her that she must have modeled the March girls on their own families (Clark 13-14). Additionally, older readers appreciated the moral lessons Alcott dispensed in the novel and took notes. "One teacher reported that, like the adult Jo at Plumfield School in *Little Men*, she kept 'a 'Conscience Book,' and it did much good,' and overall, "the children are better and happier for hearing' *Little Women* and *Little Men*" (Clark 17). The identification that middle-class readers felt with Alcott's characters did not necessarily extend to working-class audiences. Many working-class readers likely "had a penchant for less realistic fiction of the sort usually

[25] Alcott wrote privately in her journal about her desire to keep Jo an unmarried tomboy, but publicly she consented to popular demands of the genre and married Jo to Professor Bhaer. In a letter to Elizabeth Powell in 1869, Alcott writes, "Jo should have remained a literary spinster but so many enthusiastic young ladies wrote to me clamorously demanding that she should marry Laurie or somebody, that I didn't dare to refuse & out of perversity went & made a funny match for her" (*Journals* 22).

dismissed as escapist. Alcott's juvenile fiction did not appear in the story papers most likely to be found in working-class homes; nor was it available in the Sunday school libraries to which some poor children had access" (Sicherman 30). However, the working-class readers who were able to access the novel usually found it dull. Journalist Dorothy Richardson recounts a working-class woman's opinion of Alcott's novel in *The Long Day*: "'That's no story-that's just everyday happenings. I don't see what's the use of putting things like that in books. I'll bet any money that lady who wrote it knew all them boys and girls. They just seem like real, live people; and when you was telling about them I could just see them as plain as plain could be" (86). For some readers the genteel, restful life was not a possibility, so the fantasy of Capitola's physical exertion and successful role-playing was more relatable and appealing. Alcott, by contrast, has to assure her more affluent readers that even a physically active girl will ultimately become marriageable and dainty.

Jo begins *Little Women* as a rambunctious young woman with a penchant for athletic activities, one who does not initially accept her tomboyism as a stage to be superseded. In the novel, female athleticism is often conflated with masculinity and gender transgression. For instance, after Jo goes out for her third walk of the day, Alcott mentions "her queer performances," (45) and while Jo is rowing a boat to Camp Laurence, Laurie refers to her as "my dear fellow" (116). When Jo's athleticism is mentioned, it is nearly always accompanied by a remark about her gender identity. Jo is described as tall and thin and reminds readers of a colt because of her long limbs, referring to both maleness and childhood (4-5). She constantly engages in athletics; she

often tells her family that she is “going out for exercise,” and there are multiple scenes in which we see Jo ice skate, row, run, and climb.

Jo’s sisters scold her for still romping about, aware of the acceptability of tomboyism only as a phase that a girl is expected to outgrow. Within the first several pages of the novel Meg scolds Jo for not exiting this phase already, telling her, “‘You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady’” (5). To this, Jo responds, “I hate to think I’ve got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China aster!” (5). At different points in the novel, both Amy and Meg also remark that they are “too old” for dressing in costume and putting on sensational plays. They recognize that performing different identities, like those of rugged and athletic men, is unacceptable for women of their race and class. Jo, who has not realized or does not accept this, remarks that she knows Meg will only act “as long as [she] can trail round in a white gown with [her] hair down” (7). In other words, Meg will only partake in the play if her role and appearance reinforce conventional gender roles. Alcott often alludes to Jo’s discomfort with her imminent foray into puberty, writing that she had “the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and didn’t like it” (5). She would rather be a boy and remain in her “colt-like” tomboy stage. Jo declares to her sisters that she is the man of the family in their father’s absence, deems her tears “unmanly” when she cries over the destruction of her manuscript, and mirrors

the popular theater actress Charlotte Cushman[26] when she plays the men's roles in her family plays.

Throughout the novel, Jo is described as the most physically active character and she is engaged constantly in athletic activities. She uses her athleticism to cross certain borders and fit in with various groups of people. Her physical version of tomboyism provides her a cultural fluidity and an ability to present her own body and bodies of (sensational) texts to the public. For instance, Jo can relate to and interact with Laurie's male friends at Camp Laurence through sport in ways that her sisters cannot because they lack the athleticism to move easily across registers. Jo declares that she will "row and tramp about" (114) and she dons a hat that her sisters say will "make a guy of her" (115). It is this hat, though, that "broke the ice in the beginning" and facilitates Jo's easy interactions with both the boys and the girls at the picnic. She even gets along with Kate, who Jo earlier thought to have a "standoffish-don't-touch-me-air" (115), because the hat produces an entry into conversation for both girls. Jo is able to move between guests and activities seamlessly, while her sisters struggle more to do so. Meg showcases her lesser ability to traverse social registers when she asks Jo to prevent any boys from talking to her and notes that she would rather not "play, or sing, or say anything" (114).

Throughout *Little Women,* Alcott shows the ways that athletic and gender-bending qualities are linked to performance and are therefore unstable. For instance,

[26] Charlotte Cushman was one of the most famous actresses in the nineteenth century, well-known for her portrayal of men's roles on stage. Female audiences embraced and fawned over Cushman. Alcott herself writes about being mesmerized by some of Cushman's performances. What is notable about those depictions is that she frequently donned men's clothing and "played male parts so believably that her success raised questions about the extent to which gender itself is a matter of performance" (Dudden 78). Perhaps her best-known breeches role was of Romeo and Dudden writes that, "Contemporary accounts make it clear that Charlotte Cushman's Romeo was one of the nineteenth century's greatest Romeo's by *any* performer, male or female. From her fencing skills to her amorous manners--'of so erotic a character that no man would have dared indulge in them'--Cushman made an utterly compelling Romeo." The part initially was risky for her precisely because she was able to be so realistically, relentlessly masculine (92-93).

when the March girls call on neighbors, Amy and Meg insist that Jo carry her body differently and dress appropriately. Amy tells Jo that she must hold her shoulders back, carry her hands easily, and remain ladylike for fifteen minutes, as if bodily comportment defines one's gender. In response, Jo claims that "I've played the part of a prim young lady on the stage and I'll try it off. My powers are great, as you shall see" (268). Jo recognizes the performativity of gender and embodiment and explicitly links it to performance on a stage. When the first call goes awry, Amy scolds Jo and tells her to "gossip as other girls do," to which Jo retorts, "I rather enjoy this, and now I'll imitate what is called 'a charming girl,' I can do it, for I have May Chester as a model, and I'll improve upon her" (269). Amy, as a result, "felt anxious, as well she might, for when Jo *turned freakish* there was no knowing where she would stop" (269, emphasis mine). Jo's imitation abilities once again show the instability of gender roles, and Amy resorts to thinking of Jo as freakish, a word commonly ascribed to muscular and athletic women in the nineteenth century when they eschewed certain gender markers. Jo's performances are intimately connected to athleticism during these visits, not just because she attempts to "calm" her athletic and actively moving body, but also because she best fits in with the other guests only when she regales them with tales of horseback riding, an athletic endeavor that Amazons also undertook during which they "could experience parity [with men] at a level almost unimaginable for ancient [female] Hellenes" (Mayor 19). While these stories mortify Amy, the other guests laugh at them and enjoy themselves. In a social world that Jo deeply dislikes and feels uneasy in, it is sport that allows her the fluidity to converse, fit in, and achieve some form of parity. Sport becomes a form of social capital for women. By the end of the day, after the last visit with Aunt March, Jo is

done performing her role as a polite young woman and shakes hands in a “gentlemanly manner” (276). By the chapter’s end, the reader is left with the distinct impression that Jo understands how to alter how she carries her body and use conversation about sport to better move between social and class registers.

In addition to her identity as an athlete, Jo also identifies as an author, and her writing process provides insight into the connections between physicality and performance that she makes in the earlier chapters of the novel. When *Little Women* first begins, Jo is an aspiring writer, earning money from her sketches but telling nobody in her family about them. Her first encounter with story-papers comes at a lecture she attends with Miss Crocker. Here, Jo notices the boy next to her holding a "pictorial sheet...[with] an illustration of an Indian in full war costume, tumbling over a precipice with a wolf at his throat, while two infuriated young gentlemen, with unnaturally small feet and big eyes, were stabbing each other close by, and a disheveled female was flying away in the background with her mouth wide open" (247). Jo’s first impression is of the characters’ physicality and racial masquerade in this illustration. The author, Mrs. S.L.A.N.G., is a nod to E.D.E.N. Southworth. This encounter has a profound effect on Jo, who goes home with visions of writing about duels and murder for the *Blarneystone Banner*. Alcott notes that Jo's "theatrical experience and miscellaneous reading were of service now, for they gave her some idea of dramatic effect, and supplied plot, language, and costumes" (248). Jo understands that acting and costuming oneself can shape story-paper writing. She recognizes the power of inhabiting other characters and bodies, particularly for women; for her, identity is more malleable within sensational fiction. Alcott herself was an avid theater-goer and would have been familiar with the ways that

performance allowed women to carve out a marginal space to push against gender boundaries in rather public ways.[27] In the sensational plays and stories that Jo writes and performs, she presents women, often dressed as men on a stage, in public and athletic ways. Her characters, and Jo herself, modify their visibility. For instance, when performing *The Witches Curse*, Jo and her sisters simulate sword fights, adjust their costumes, and tuck their falling hair under the wigs as the play progresses, constantly adjusting how their bodies are legible to and read by audiences. Through her writing and acting, Jo casts off any sense of "feminine literary propriety" (Traub 157).

Shortly after taking up the pen, Jo "took to writing sensation stories, for in the dark ages, even all-perfect America read rubbish. She told no one, but concocted a 'thrilling tale,' and boldly carried it herself to Mr. Dashwood, editor of the *Weekly Volcano*. She had never read *Sartos Resartus*, but she had a womanly instinct that clothes possess an influence more powerful over many than the worth of character or the magic of manners" (317). [28] Here, clothes can influence precisely because they are changeable. Jo can put forth a more feminine appearance than she normally does because clothes allow her to cover her "colt-like" limbs and mute her athletic persona. It is this elasticity of identity that women writers in the mid-century begin to recognize, particularly when it comes to tomboy characters. Jo can be an athletic tomboy or domestic daughter or

[27] Madeleine B. Stern writes in the introduction to Louisa May Alcott's journals, "Alcott's fascination with the stage endured practically all her life and infiltrated most of her writings...In a barn converted for private theatricals, in a drawing room adapted for charity performances, or at the floodlit proscenium of the Boston Theater, Louisa Alcott vented her stage fever as actress, dramatist, or member of the audience...Alcott's development from novice to critic in her attendance at lectures was duplicated in her role as spectator of plays. In 1858, when she saw the popular American actress Charlotte Cushman, she 'had a stagestruck fit' and actually 'had hopes of trying a new life' as an actress. When the hopes were dimmed she determined to 'try again by-and-by, and see if I have the gift. Perhaps it is acting, not writing, I'm meant for. Nature must have a vent somehow.' The vent she found, of course, in writing: 'Worked off my stage fever in writing a story, and felt better'" (*Journals* 15). Stern also notes that Alcott saw Edwin Forrest and Fanny Kemble on the stage, both thespians who used their bodies immensely and in very active ways when they performed.
[28] This is likely meant to be a reference to the *New York Ledger*.

womanly author or any number of other things. She can cut her hair, change her clothing, choose to engage in athletics and develop her muscles, refrain from physical activity, carry her body differently, or discuss sport with groups of people she would otherwise have little to converse about. While this flexibility is liberatory and empowering for many women, the recognition that identity could be performed and social boundaries could be crossed during that performance causes anxiety in many other Americans.

When engaged in writing her thrillers, Jo experiences an acute bodily awareness, mirroring the literary Amazons from the beginning of the chapter. Alcott describes it, writing:

> Every few weeks she would shut herself up in her room, put on her scribbling suit, and 'fall into a vortex,' as she expressed it, writing away at her novel with all her heart and soul, for till that was finished she could find no peace…Sleep forsook her eyes, meals stood untasted, day and night were all too short to enjoy the happiness which blessed her only at such times, and made these hours worth living, even if they bore no other fruit. The divine afflatus usually lasted a week or two, and then she emerged from her 'vortex,' hungry, sleepy, cross, or despondent" (246).

When scratching out stories about adventurous and athletic young women, Jo's own writing process dictates that she also push her body to extremes, feeling the fatigue, energy, and deprivation that accompanied it.

Even in her research for stories, Jo begins to imbibe her surroundings, which has a bodily effect on her. Because Jo's upbringing was free of murder, violence, and swashbuckling, she voraciously consumes every newspaper and story on the subjects that

she could. Jo makes library visits, studies the faces of every person she passes, and reads books about crime. The result of all this research is the desecration “of the womanliest attributes of a woman’s character” (Alcott 321). Alcott writes that Jo “was feeding heart and fancy on dangerous and unsubstantial food…She was beginning to feel rather than see this, for much describing other people’s passions and feelings set her to studying and speculating about her own” (321). Alcott shows the negative physical effects that thrillers have on Jo, linking embodiment and genre. Aside from the times that she is engaged in physical activity, Jo is most aware of her body when reading and writing her thrillers. In other words, Alcott makes the case that exposure to unsavory, lower-class, boundary-pushing aspects of life can affect one's body. In a novel ultimately meant to moralize and teach young readers, Jo's sponge-like embodiment—physically influenced by the things she reads—suggests that young readers could be adversely affected by reading about Jo's athletic gender transgressions.

Jo’s writing experiences are modeled on Alcott’s own in many ways. Under the pseudonym A.M. Barnard she published thirty-three “blood and thunder” thrillers like *Behind A Mask*, *The Abbot’s Ghost*, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, and *Pauline’s Passion*. Like Jo, Alcott wrote that when she composed a thriller, "Genius burned so fiercely that for four weeks I wrote all day and planned nearly all night, being quite possessed by my work" (*Journals* 19). At other times, Alcott describes being so consumed by her writing that she could not "stop to eat or sleep, or *for anything but a daily run*" (*Journals* 23, emphasis mine). Writing not only compounded the physical effects that women experienced, but it even required physical training. It is of note that Alcott “evidently preferred these popular stories to her domestic fiction, composed at the same

time…[C]omposing the domestic texts was drudgery, about which she complained frequently in her letters and journals (Merish 45). Much like Jo, Alcott is most physically active and aware of her body when she is writing for story-papers. Both women's bodies are kinetic, buzzing, moving, and shrugging off sleep when engaged in this type of work.

Jo remains an athletic tomboy until the moment that she ultimately decides to give up her sensational stories and marry Professor Bhaer. Her athleticism is erased, her deftness in navigating different boundaries evaporates, and her public writing ceases. It is no coincidence that this evacuation coincides with her move away from sensational stories and into her marriage to the Professor. In conversation with Jo, Friedrich "advised her to study simple, true, and lovely characters, wherever she found them, as good training for a writer" (321). Shortly thereafter, when he suspects Jo of writing "bad trash," Bhaer tells her that he, "does not like to think that good young girls should see such things" (326). He views her as a literary Amazon in much the same way men during the nineteenth century viewed women writers—a woman exposing herself to countless immoral situations and avoiding a more domestic life. Jo angrily responds that "Many very respectable people make an honest living out of what are called sensation stories" (326). Friedrich, emphasizing the influence sensation stories have over young people, continues, "If the respectable people knew what harm [sensational stories] did, they would not feel that the living *was* honest. They haf no right to put poison in the sugarplum, and let the small ones eat it" (326). These remarks affect Jo, who tells Friedrich, "I'll be very good and proper now" (326). She concedes that her stories only do harm to herself and others before she burns them all in the stove.

Almost immediately after Jo's genre shift, she is seen holding a child in her lap and described by Mr. Bhaer as having a "new softness in her face" (329). Right away, Alcott portrays Jo as motherly, feminine, and soft, rather than mannish, disheveled, and athletic, as she had been described previously. There are no scenes after this point that describe Jo engaging in any sort of physical fitness and she is no longer described in athletic terms, or as a tomboy. After Jo forsakes her story-paper tales, we see her only sparingly for several chapters; her character, who had been described at length in nearly every chapter before this, disappears from the novel for an extended period of time once she changes her authorial identity. Instead, the focus turns to Laurie and Amy's relationship, and the children Daisy and Demi. Jo's shift away from story-papers not only separates her from her athleticism, but it renders her body invisible for a time. When Jo does reemerge in the plot, she is in a dire state, grieving Beth's death and doing housework "which she slowly learned to see and value." Other characters remark on the changes they see in Jo and she notes that, "I'm not the scatterbrain I was; you may trust me, I'm sober and sensible enough for anyone's confidante now" (401). Jo, who once had little time or use for the sentimental, now embraces it when Mr. Bhaer expresses his appreciation for it. And she places herself firmly in a domestic sphere, remarking, "I may be strong-minded, but no one can say I'm out of my sphere now, for woman's special mission is supposed to be drying tears and bearing burdens. I'm to carry my share, Friedrich, and help to earn the home" (438). Jo's acknowledgement that no one can declare that she is "out of her sphere" points to the ways that her tomboyism previously allowed her to traverse boundaries.

By the end of *Little Women,* Jo's impropriety, which once revolved around her tomboyism, now has to do with her romantic encounters. Alcott writes that "Jo never, never would learn to be proper," but she immediately follows this declaration with a scene in which Jo leans over to kiss Professor Bhaer in public. Now Jo's offense is not athletic, and not even very transgressive. She certainly isn't pushing against any defined gender roles in this scene. Her life becomes much more about the private sphere, and her athleticism is gone. This is perhaps unsurprising as the word "athlete" has its origins in publicness. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, its early usage meant "a competitor in *public games*, participating in any of various individual sporting events, such as running, jumping, boxing, and wrestling" ("athlete, n1", emphasis mine). But as Jo makes clear, "[she] found the applause of her boys more satisfying than any praise of the world, for now she told no stories except to her flock of enthusiastic believers and admirers" (444). Jo has reoriented herself and no longer talks of public displays of athleticism. She no longer desires to march in the war or charge horses across the countryside or play drums amongst other boys and men. She is content with her "flock" in the comfort of her home. In the last pages of the novel, Alcott describes a scene at Plumfield in which Friedrich is "[charging] up and down the green aisles like a stout Tuetonic knight, with a pole for a lance, leading on the boys," and Laurie "rode his small daughter in a bushelbasket [and] took Daisy up among the birds' nest, and kept adventurous Rob from breaking his neck" (445). They are climbing and running and engaging in sport. Even Little Teddy is "whisked up into a tree by one lad [and] galloped off on the back of another." However, Jo has "her baby tucked under her arm" (445). At the close of the story Alcott does not show Jo engaged physical activity or accomplishing athletic feats.

Rather, she has now assumed the role of mother while the men around her remain active. She sits under a tree with her sisters, speaks in the "maternal way of all mankind," and notes that her next book "can wait" (447). Her athleticism is no longer a threat to readers and her character no longer represents gender instability. Instead, Jo is simply still.

Stage Adaptations

The overwhelming popularity of both *The Hidden Hand* and *Little Women* gave rise to theatrical productions of each novel. Those relocations make clear how space—whether it is on a page or on a stage—influences female athleticism. Robert Jones's 1867 adaptation of *The Hidden Hand*, for instance, exaggerates Capitola's bodily features and their pliability. In the script, Capitola's costumes connect her athleticism to identity performance. In nearly every scene, stage directions indicate that Capitola should be dressed in either her Rag Alley attire or a riding habit and whip. Keeping Cap in her Bowery Boys outfit prevents audiences from forgetting about the gender discrepancies and switches that populate the story. Alternating Capitola's athletic attire with her Bowery Boy clothing made it more likely that audiences conflated athleticism with performance. In the play, Wool emphasizes Capitola's everchanging bodily performances and her elastic identity. In a novel of nearly 500 pages, Wool refers to Capitola as "caterpillar" a total of twelve times. In a forty-six page script, he calls her "Caterpillar" ten times. Clearly, the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly is important to the stage version of *The Hidden Hand,* and on the stage audiences can observe costume changes, athletic movements, and character transformations right in front of them. This reference also recalls the shift from tomboy to woman, but Cap's athleticism remains intact on the stage, just as it does in the novel, perhaps in even more noticeable ways.

Throughout the play, characters verbally call attention to their identity performances on the stage. When Wool initially calls Capitola "Caterpillar," they are discussing her equestrian training, about which she says "I'll go crazy with joy!" (2.1).[29] Immediately, the transformative nature of a caterpillar is linked to female athleticism in a positive way. Then, in the Clara-Capitola switch scene, Capitola discusses her ability to assume multiple identities more explicitly than she does in the novel, declaring to Clara, "'Oh, never fear me. I can accommodate my figure to anything. It won't be the first time that I've worn clothes that didn't belong to me'" (4.3). When Clara encounters Wool on stage and mounts her horse, he calls her "Miss Caterpillar," though in the novel he calls her "Cap." Robert Jones, the playwright, obviously identified the ways that athleticism and identity shifts work together in Southworth's text and amplified them on the stage. The decision to have Wool call Clara "Miss Caterpillar" illustrates the ease with which characters can slide in and out of different roles on the stage if they are athletic. In the play, after realizing the switch that has been made, Wool shouts at Clara, "Young missus changed from a catapiller to a butterfly…stop de debil dat's transmogrified her" (4.3). This scene then closes with Capitola exposing her disguise to LeNoir and telling him, "The play's over; the curtain's going to drop; and the principal performer, that's me, is about to be called out, amid the applause of the audience." On the stage, sensational stories and their female characters discuss the performative aspects of identity openly. Jones uses the forum of the theater to amplify Cap's athletic embodiment and blatantly

[29] In this same scene, Wool pokes fun at Major Warfield's own lack of athleticism and recalls his first time mounting a horse: "Well, you see, he [the horse] rard up, and ole massa turned a summerset over into de swamp; and dar he was, wid his two legs standing in de air, and his head stickin in de mud" This novel predates Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* by nearly forty years, but she writes a similar scene in her work. Miss Ophelia Davis and Mr. James, both black Bostonians, are riding bikes and fall over the handlebars into a pile of sand. Hopkins's characters remark on the whiteness of their skin as they emerge from the sand, contrasting the darkness of the mud in this *Hidden Hand* scene. There seems to be a connection in the nineteenth-century between failed athleticism and racial indeterminacy.

gesture to the audience that athleticism and performance are closely linked. Not only that, but he prompts the audience's response, telling them that they will applaud those athletic performances. In a way, Jones is conditioning the audience to respond positively to the athletic bodies in front of them, showing onlookers that female athleticism is an advantageous trait rather than a deviant or negative one.

In the stage versions of the *Little Women*, Jo's character undergoes noticeable changes, demonstrating the ways that audiences responded to her athleticism in the decades after the novel's release. For instance, in the Elizabeth Lincoln Gould's adaptation (1900), Jo's character is first introduced to the audience having a coughing fit. In contrast to the healthy, physically fit character that readers initially meet in the novel, Jo is sickly here. Throughout the play she makes comments to the other March sisters like, "why, I'm liable to be subject to fits of coughing anytime" (Act 2). Simultaneously, Jo's character refers to herself as boyish and other characters notice her "queerness." Despite the boyishness attributed to Jo, she never once engages in any sort of athletic activity in this script, nor does Gould draw much attention to Jo in the way of authorship. A few passing references are made to Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, but Jo's character does not value or partake in writing to the same degree that she does in the original novel. Gould seems to have "tamed" our literary Amazon from the beginning by drawing attention immediately and often to her cough and eliminating her authorly persona.

Similarly, a 1911 version of the play by Marian de Forest presents a character lacking in athleticism. De Forest does not erase scenes of athleticism altogether as Gould does, but when she does present a sporting scene, de Forest excludes Jo. For instance, in this play version of *Little Women*, Amy and Laurie go ice skating together, and Jo

declines to join them. When Laurie pushes Jo to accompany him she responds, "Cant—Want to finish a story…Go away, Teddy. I'm busy!" (2.1). Like the earlier version of the play, Jo is still equated with boyishness and even called a tomboy, but she has little to no connection to physical activity. Rather, she is described in the character descriptions at the end of the script as "angular, comical, but not grotesque…A thorough tomboy, but this modifies as play progresses" (137). Jo's transition away from tomboyism is attributed to the "falling-in-love process" (137). In this version of the play, Jo is still an author of sensational stories and Professor Bhaer lectures Jo as he does in the novel, nearly word-for-word. However, when she burns her story-paper tales, she does not do so privately as she does in the novel; instead, she throws them in the fire in front of both of her parents. The stage directions read, "MARCH looking on, evidently amused at the way Jo has taken her lesson...MRS. MARCH, bending over her work, is smiling" (2.2). This scene serves as a lesson to audiences—forego immoral writing and athletic pursuits and earn the approval of your parents. What is so interesting about these stage productions is the performance of identities. Actors can stand in front of an audience and demand that their corporeality be read, but never pinned down; yet, Jo's character shows no sort of athletic ability or desire on the stage. In a situation where audiences can truly appreciate Jo's muscularity, speed, dexterity, and coordination, playwrights have erased those qualities from her character. As a result, audiences were given a Jo who could not use her athleticism to move fluidly between spaces and identities.

In the mid-nineteenth century, women writers were grappling with how to address and present athletic female characters. Southworth and Alcott begin to show the limits of female athleticism in literature, both in terms of race and space, particularly where

tomboys are involved. They explore tomboyism as an orientation, examining the differences in its temporality for both Capitola and Jo as they age, as well as the varying levels of anxiety that surround each woman about transgressing heteronormative values . "Orientations allow us to take up space insofar as they take time," according to Sara Ahmed. "Even when orientations seem to be about which way we are facing in the present, they also point us toward the future." A departure from the "straight and narrow," which makes new futures possible, was a risk if one did not give up her tomboyism after adolescence (*Queerness* 21). Moving into the last decades of the nineteenth century, authors begin to explore women's paths away from the "straight and narrow" after adolescence. As I will show in the following chapter, authors of regional literature use women cyclists to begin to map those new futures. They write characters who explore various orientations to different regions and what those mean for their athletic embodiment. Ultimately, Southworth and Alcott introduced readers to two early female athletes who point us to new futures and new orientations towards athletic female embodiment.

CHAPTER 4

"THE STEED THAT NEVER TIRES:" REGIONALISM AND RUPTURE IN CYCLING NARRATIVES

"The [female] body is also a site which is mobile and malleable, able to change in response to changing circumstances and able to be configured in terms of various spaces, from the home to the podium. Because of its mobility, the body becomes an excellent vehicle for destabilization of categories; the body can demonstrate and enact the fluidity of boundaries via its literal physical movement, movement into and out of homes, movement in travel, and movement through sport"

-Alison Piepmeier, *Out in Public*, 2004

"It may be that dogs, which seem to regard themselves as a sort of special police, consider women out of place on a wheel, and in need of correction"

-Fanny Bullock Workman, *Algerian Memories*, 1896

In the late-1880s, after her mother passed away, Frances Willard learned to ride a bicycle. She was fifty-three years old at the time, and though she had been an athletic woman when she was younger, on her sixteenth birthday she had to stop "running wild" (10). This was the time "when the hampering long skirts were brought, with their accompanying corset and high heels" (10). In Willard's words, giving up her athletic endeavors caused her "the first heartbreak of a young human colt taken from its pleasant pasture" because she recognized that her "occupation [was] gone" (10). When her mother died, Willard realized that she wanted "new worlds to conquer," and the bicycle was just the tool to achieve that (11). In *Wheel Within a Wheel* (1895), Willard's memoir about learning to ride, she dispenses advice about cycling that often doubles as guidance for

how women should navigate their surroundings. For Willard, the bicycle is a way "to help women to a wider world" (73). It helped to reshape her own philosophy of life, imbued her with a sense of adventure, and even changed the "picture of the road" that she had in her mind whenever she traveled (23). In other words, Willard sees cycling as a way for women to broaden their worlds, change their understanding and mapping of spaces, and connect with others. Her cycling memoir represents changing attitudes in literature at the end of the nineteenth century towards women's use of the bicycle—authors are beginning to understand how it allows women to become transregional.

In the decades following the Civil War, audiences consumed magazines that published regional sketches and short stories in large numbers. These regional tales appeared in elite magazines like *Godey's, The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper's* between roughly 1850 and 1910, but they reached the height of their popularity during the last three decades of the nineteenth century (Brodhead 124). Regional literature tended to be short—sketches and stories—and made extensive use of dialect. Most stories were set in rural areas and trafficked in nostalgia about various folkways; many excluded clear indications about when, exactly, the stories were set. By omitting specific historical people or events, regionalist authors created spaces apart from the conflicts of the United States, idyllic pasts into which privileged readers "escaped." Because regionalist authors tended to be non-dominant or marginalized people in some way, readers tricked themselves into thinking that they were indulging in an "authentic" experience with a place, a dialect, and so on (Brodhead 116-17).

Under the screen of such nostalgia, as critics such Stephanie Foote, Judith Fetterley, and Marjorie Pryse argue, regional literature disrupts hierarchies, complicates

questions of regional and national belonging, and provides a voice for marginalized, non-dominant authors in important and interesting ways.[30] Though they seem insular at first glance, regions represented in regional literature are more diverse and porous than initially thought. In regional literature, women tend to take advantage of this porousness with bicycles, vehicles that literally facilitate movement through and across physical spaces. Athletic women traverse terrain, cut across class and race lines as they move into different neighborhoods and spaces, and maneuver themselves into places they would be unable to access with bicycles. Significantly, cycling gave women the capability to move across space and time. It allows women to move in and out of seemingly pre-modern regions on a vehicle that stands in for modernity. Athletic women force us to rethink our understanding of regionalism's orientation to space and time. Orientations, as Sara Ahmed notes, "point us toward the future," even when they seem "to be about which way we are facing in the present" (*Queerness* 20-21). Athletic women, through their constant movements across regional spaces, make new futures within literary regionalism possible.

In *Writing Out of Place*, Marjorie Pryse and Judith Fetterley argue that "women inhabit a region, and the moment one speaks as a woman who recognizes this fact one becomes regionalized" (36). I am interested in their claim that "regionalized" women "mark themselves as 'out of place' in their culture." The women cyclists with whom I am concerned seem not to see themselves as out of place so much as constantly moving and

[30] Foote acknowledges that regional writing is simultaneously associated with "the interests of the persons who…were themselves considered minor or marginal—women, minority writers, provincials, sexual dissidents, and village dwellers," and "considered a narrow, static, elegiac, eminently predictable genre" (27). So, does regionalism really represent "vernacular cultures as enclaves of tradition insulated from larger cultural contact," or are these spaces open to non-normative people (121)? Foote and Brodhead seem to suggest that it is the latter in their writings.

performing their place across regions. In other words, they are able to craft (athletic) identities that allow them to, at least partially, blend into a (new or hostile) place. Bicycling women in regional literature are regularly in motion and unable to exist "in that lifeless stillness" (Cather 7). They embrace a continually changing relationship to place, and become forces of modernity, whose bicycles upset the fantasy of region as pre-historic and rooted.

In this chapter, I draw upon several regional texts to consider how female cyclists were "regionalized," to borrow Fetterley and Pryse's term, and how they regionalized themselves. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, athletic women began to populate regional literature in large numbers. In particular, female characters on safety bikes appear frequently. Authors as wide-ranging as Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, Pauline Hopkins, Octave Thanet (Alice French), Frances Willard, Pauline Hopkins, and Caroline Shelley published stories featuring female cyclists. I examine texts by Willa Cather, Fanny Bullock Workman, and Pauline Hopkins to better understand how those female cyclists move across both geographic and cultural spaces. Like Amy Kaplan, I believe that geographic spaces and ideological power go hand-in-hand. She sees the two as inseparable from one another when it comes to regional literature and notes that, "[m]any novels of the period explore past and present borders and frontiers to imagine a community through exclusion as much as inclusion" (242-43). Put another way, shifting geographical borders influence cultural boundaries and who has access to that culture. I claim that women cyclists can traverse a lot of ground and move across gender roles, but it typically requires white privilege to make that happen.

Rapid changes in industrialization and transportation accompanied "unparalleled physical mobility" during the late-nineteenth century, and a "psychic dislocation" often resulted from those changes (Foote 29-30). Cycling, then, contributes to a sense of categorical uncertainty. Authors depict women characters in regional literature who take advantage of this instability, sensing how difficult it becomes to fix one's identity when in motion. In response, they mediate their identities and switch registers as they move through neighborhoods, regions, or nations. As they cross gendered, raced, geographic, economic, and class boundaries, these women deliberately adopt particular athletic identities—strategically masculine cyclist, citizen-of-the-world rider, and middle-class performer—in order to enter masculine or exotic spaces. These identities are mostly resistant to contamination by those spaces; however, the scope of access to these spaces and the roles that may be adopted are much more limited for the black woman cyclist. Because the language of athletic pursuits crosses boundaries in many ways—the instances in which this crossing fails tell us a lot too, as I will show—athletic women become chameleons.

In this chapter I begin with some brief context about cycling in the 1890s and women's place within the bicycle movement. This leads into a discussion of Willa Cather's short story "Tommy" (1896), about an athletic young woman who moves East and then returns to the West. In Cather's story, Tommy carries her athletic body differently depending on the situation. For instance, in the East she carries herself in a "seemly manner" (6). When she returns to the Old Boys, Tommy shakes all of their hands and maintains a "shrewd face, that was so like a clever wholesome boy's, held high with happiness;" comparatively, when she cycles across the scorched western landscape,

Tommy "sat very badly…and looked aggressively masculine" (6-7). Tommy uses strategic masculinism to traverse regions, changing her facial expressions and bodily movements in each situation. While "Tommy" explores transregionalism, Fanny Bullock Workman's travel narrative, *Sketches Awheel In Modern Iberia* (1897), depicts her cycling trip across Spain. Workman displays many of the same abilities to perform her athletic identity to her advantage that Tommy does; however, Workman uses that athleticism as a vehicle for white, feminine superiority. She gains access to spaces on her bicycle that most (white) women are unable to, but she does so at the expense of people of color who remain still while Workman passes them by. I then close the chapter with an examination of Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* (1900), one illustration of the limits placed on the body of the black cyclist. In each of these works, women cyclists expose the porous boundaries of region, demarcate their own regional spaces on bicycles, and trouble the authenticity of place-based identity through their own metamorphosing performances.

The Cycling Craze of the 1890s

Much has been written about the frenzy that overcame the United States during the last decade of the nineteenth century as the safety bike gained in popularity and women began to ride. When early models of the bicycle were first marketed in the United States, their designs were such that they were not popular among riders, men or women. Reasons for the lack of popularity can be surmised from the nickname of one of the early models—the boneshaker (Macy 16). Early bicycles were heavy, didn't have rubber tires or pedals, lacked comfort, were difficult for women to ride in their long skirts, and remained slow. However, as bike designs changed, cycling handbooks proliferated, and

cycling clubs and communities sprang up. In 1885 in the United States, about 11,000 bikes were manufactured. Just a decade later, in 1896, nearly one million bicycles were in production and "Americans had spent $300 million on bicycles…and $200 million on related products" (Macy 25). As Frances Willard observes, "Already I know well enough that tens of thousands who could never afford to own, feed, and stable a horse, had by this bright invention enjoyed the swiftness of motion which is perhaps the most fascinating feature of material life" (11) With an expanded market, now consisting of vast swaths of the middle-class, manufacturers wanted to ensure that they reaped maximum profits, so they adjusted bicycles throughout the 1890s to appeal to more women. The design was altered so women could more comfortably ride, and advertisements marketed towards women abounded. Bikes were such a cultural phenomenon in the 1890s that "bicycle talk" became part of everyday language (Macy 41). Songs were written about biking ("Daisy, Daisy…you look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two"), the conditions of roads and maps were improved for cyclists, businesses felt the boom of riders buying cycling accessories, and literature about cyclists abounded. Put another way, the cycling craze affected nearly all corners of life and culture in the United States, even for non-cyclists.

Initially, bicycles marketed towards women had both pedals on the left-hand side of the bike so that women could ride sidesaddle, as they would on a horse. This design proved flawed and the next popular bike design for women was the tricycle (Macy 23). The tricycle's design is particularly interesting for the ways that it creates a space, or micro-region, for women to occupy. The tricycle, in effect, becomes a moveable and contained region of its own. This bike, as seen in Figure 4.1, has two large wheels in back

Figure 4.1, *Bicycling* (L. Prang & Co.)

that hover above the height of the rider, acting like walls on either side of her body. While the tricycle enclosed riders in noticeable ways, the safety bicycle that rocketed to popularity a few years later also commanded a space of its own. It may be helpful to think of the bicycle as a field, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms. He notes that "[a]s a space of potential and active forces, the field is also a *field of struggles* aimed at preserving or transforming the configuration of these forces" (Bourdieu, Wacquant 101). At various points in "Tommy," *Sketches Awheel*, and *Contending Forces*, we see the authors positioning the bicycle

as a space unto itself, as well as a space of active forces, which I will explore in greater depth shortly.

At the end of the nineteenth century, female cyclists were growing in numbers before both derisive and encouraging audiences. The New Woman was emerging on the scene, women's athletic clothing was changing, race suicide was a concern for some Americans, and anxieties ran high about women's more independent roles in society. As Patricia Marks notes, "humorists warned in mock horror about the inevitable submission of men. More serious writers, versed in Spencerian theory, feared that such progress was really regress to a more primitive state; the more activities and interests men and women shared, the less differentiated and less civilized they purportedly grew" (174). However, no clear consensus existed across the country about whether or not women cyclists were a detriment to society. One party feared the independence that bicycles provided women. Women were now able to be mobile, to go places that were previously barred to them, and as Frances Willard writes in *A Wheel Within A Wheel*, they acquired "this new implement of power and literally [put] it underfoot" (73). Others feared that vigorous

activity would harm women's reproductive capabilities and prevent white women from reproducing. This was especially disturbing to many white Americans in light of the steady stream of immigration during the nineteenth century. Gender stereotypes ran deep and detractors feared that women riders would forego their prescribed roles within marriages, become inattentive mothers, derive sexual pleasure from the bicycle seat,[31] or develop "masculine" musculature. On the other hand, women cyclists thrived in biking communities and were often accepted by men on the road. Couples cycled together, plenty of doctors praised the health benefits of cycling for women, and riding was seen simply as a fun activity by a lot of Americans. The characters and cyclists that I discuss in the rest of this chapter recognize the ambivalent feelings towards them and their bodies and use the source of that ambivalence—the bicycle—to gain access to masculine and exotic spaces; they gain the capacity, through the bicycle, to move across gender and space-time roles, but that movement requires whiteness to succeed.

Cather's "Tommy, The Unsentimental"

Willa Cather's "Tommy, the Unsentimental" is about Tommy Shirley, a young woman who lives in the West. She eschews conventional notions of femininity and fits more comfortably into the tomboy mold. The Old Boys, a group of older men in town, have taken Tommy under their wing, and she fits in quite easily with them. However, they express a dislike of her friendship with Jay Ellington Harper, an effeminate young man from the East who lacks business acumen and seems to need Tommy to help him out of a fair number of situations. Much to the dismay of the "Old Boys," Tommy leaves the

[31] Ellen Gruber Garvey's chapter, "Magazines and Scorching Women," from *The Adman in the Parlor,* does a wonderful job of giving a history of women's bicycle ads. Gruber Garvey concludes that the ads showcase the anxieties about women's sexual pleasure. She notes, "anti-bicyclers claimed that riding would ruin women's sexual health by promoting masturbation" (106).

West and heads East for college. Upon her return, she brings her new friend, Jessica, who embodies the conventional female qualities that Tommy does not. Shortly after she gets back, there is a run on the bank where Jay Harper works, and Tommy must ride her bike twenty-five miles to fix the situation for him. Throughout the story Cather illustrates how Tommy uses strategic masculinism to traverse regions; her performing female body and female masculinity are read as resilient in the West, but also as proper women's college etiquette in the East Coast space. These facets of her identity make her tougher than Jessica is out west and illustrate the expansion of her gender roles and social interactions because of her athleticism.

Tommy's athletic performativity permits her to navigate the regional affiliation that the Old Boys attempt to impose on her, but also grants her the freedom to connect with national narratives in ways that the men in Southdown cannot. Tommy's interactions with Miss Jessica, and her participation in athletics in the East and West, illustrate the ways that cycling is capable of linking both women to a larger national community. Spaces become less distinct and more fluid at certain moments in "Tommy," but are reinscribed at others, and the story does not clearly position a regional narrative over a national one or vice versa; instead, it uses cycling to nuance and complicate them. The bicycle connects Tommy to characters from East and West, and it is the vehicle that reaffirms her Americanness because her cycling and athleticism grant her a joint citizenship in each region. Tommy operates within the same Western culture that her male peers do, which means both acknowledging regional differences and subtly undermining them.

From the beginning of Cather's story, Tommy embodies masculine qualities, which are associated with the West. "Her keen gray eyes and wide forehead were scarcely girlish, and she had the lank figure of an active half grown lad" (6). She is smart, rugged, determined, and affable. Tommy aids her father in his business and in the West, "people rather expect some business ability in a girl there, and they respect it immensely" (6). This distinction between the East and the West is one that Cather shows Tommy's ambivalence about; she does not seem to fully buy into it like some of the other characters do. She does, however, assume a particular identity out of obligation to her father's friends. As Cather writes, "[Tommy's billiards playing] displeased and puzzled Jay Ellington Harper, and Tommy knew it full well, but clung to her old manner of living with a stubborn pertinacity, feeling somehow that to change would be both foolish and disloyal to the Old Boys" (6). Cather clues the readers in here to the customs that may be unfamiliar to characters moving between the two spaces—Harper does not understand Tommy's inclusion in certain "male-coded" spaces—but Cather also portrays Tommy as occupying some Western ideals simply to please her elders. They make demands on her and she performs her identity in certain ways in order to maintain some cultural cache with them.

When Tommy makes a decision of her own to leave the West, the Old Boys do not approve of her move to the East Coast: "The seven Old Boys shook their heads; they did not like to see her gravitating toward the East; it was a sign of weakening, they said, and showed an inclination to experiment with another kind of life, Jay Ellington Harper's kind" (6). The West is tied to a kind of strength and embodiment that the East is not for them – the fear seems to be that Tommy's athletic identity will weaken when she moves

away. When she returns to Southdown, Tommy is sure to openly express her "evident joy on getting back to Southdown," which "was appreciated by everyone" (6). She shakes hands with a "shrewd face" and professes how she missed the blue sky of the West in efforts to appease the Old Boys and fit back into the Western culture (6). The Old Boys cannot understand life outside the West. Harper, who is constantly described as "out of his element," does not understand life outside the East. And our cyclist, Tommy, seems to be the character that bridges that gap, acclimating to and understanding multiple regional spaces. Tommy's athletic performativity leaves her more mobile and better able to navigate the contours of difference social spaces than the Old Boys. For instance, one of the Old Boys, Joe Elsworth, says that he cannot stay in Southdown and watch "the abominable suffering" of Tommy and Jay's relationship, particularly as he cannot do anything to help Tommy. Instead, he is "going to run down to Kansas City for awhile." But, Cather simply writes, "He didn't go" (7). The Old Boys are always still and ineffectual in their designs. Joe can neither help Tommy nor leave Southdown. Their form of masculinity is less flexible than Tommy's own female masculinity, which combines her theatricality and embodiment, to create something dynamic and always shifting. Where the Old Boys are stuck in one space and one role—self-appointed authorities on what constitutes a "good" Westerner—Tommy can play multiple roles.

Tommy ignores the Old Boys' misgivings and goes East, but in doing so, she does not abandon her pursuit of sports. Instead, she gives up some of the traits that she had assumed to fit in with the older men—billiards and cocktails—and "conducted herself in a most seemly manner" (6). This suggests that Tommy is in control of the perception of her identity and understands that certain behaviors hold different cultural capital in

different regions. In the East, "She took rather her own way with the curriculum, but she distinguished herself in athletics, which in Southdown counted for vastly more than erudition" (3). Sports transcend region, then—and Tommy's joint citizenship in both the East and the West highlights and reaffirms her Americanness over regionalism. Cather frames the West as placing more emphasis on sports, but the fact that Tommy is able to carry her athleticism and participation in sport to school is significant. While she must add and drop certain traits based on her location, Tommy is active wherever she goes. Sports allow her to traverse regions in fairly seamless ways.

If Tommy participates in sports in the East, the assumption here is also that others in the East do too. Tommy's inclusion in an active sports culture at school leaves the question open as to whether or not her friend, Miss Jessica, is athletic herself. Though Jessica ultimately proves not to be an accomplished athlete like Tommy, the fact that there is a space that might allow her to partake in sport unsettles the strict dichotomy that seems to be set up at the beginning of the story between rugged Western sportswoman and dainty Eastern woman. In fact, while the Old Boys laud Tommy for her business savvy and claim her as one of their own—a Westerner who should scorn the East and dismiss traditionally feminine pursuits—Cather explicitly states that athletics "counted for vastly more than erudition" in Southdown (3). Thus, Cather makes those who are culturally conversant in sports more intelligent by Southdown standards. At no point are the older men depicted playing sports or riding bikes, but Miss Jessica *does* attempt to keep pace with Tommy on a strenuous bike ride, meaning that she may actually be better able to relate to Tommy than the Old Boys are simply because she makes an effort to participate in the athletic world. The Old Boys' value system, which they put in place to

preserve the character and exclusivity of a particular region, begins to bridge the gap between the East and West. Still, this shared identity does not mean that Tommy shuns her associations with the West or that Jessica is automatically welcomed into Southdown. It simply suggests that movement across borders and identification with multiple communities is more attainable through sport. Athletic women like Tommy understand how to mediate their identities and switch between affiliations, due in large part to their capacity to already operate within certain gendered structures of power. The ways that her body is controlled and authored by others forces Tommy to become more adept at moving between registers.

While Jessica does attempt the twenty-five-mile trek with Tommy, she is less successful in her efforts, showing that women move between registers with varying degrees of success. During the long ride, Jessica and Tommy are subjected to scorching temperatures, a long ascent, and little access to water. Throughout this grueling ride, Tommy's bike maps the West for the reader and marks the literal movement across regions: "The road from Southdown to Red Willow…is rough, hilly and climbs from the river bottoms up to the big Divide by a steady up grade, running white and hot through the scorched corn fields and grazing lands where the long-horned Texan cattle browse about in the old buffalo wallows" (7). While Tommy is able to move from space to space and relationship to relationship on her bike, Jessica does not fare as well. After covering half the route, she realizes that there is "little sensibility for anything but the throbbing, dazzling heat," and she succumbs to the elements. Crossing from the river bottom to the big Divide proves to be too much. As Tommy pedals away, she thinks, "'Well, your kind have the best of it generally, but in little affairs of this sort my kind come out rather

strongly'" (7). Tommy likely means that Jessica's "kind" is conventionally feminine and her own "kind" is more ambiguously gendered. But, we can also take Tommy's comparison to stand for athletic women and their transregionalism. In affairs of this kind—long, strenuous feats—Tommy's fit body and successful athleticism help her come out stronger than Jessica. Tommy, who had just been "sweet and gentle to one of her own sex," quickly switches gears, showing a willingness to look "aggressively masculine" as soon as she begins to "pump" her bike (7). It is as if both Tommy and Jessica recognize that "following lines also involves forms of social investment…*subjects reproduce the lines that they follow*" (Ahmed, *Queerness* 17). To follow the line from Southdown to Red Willow reproduces that transregional athleticism in Tommy, while Jessica avoids that reproduction by failing to follow the line to its conclusion. Jessica, though she tries to embody the same athletic spirit as Tommy, is unwilling to put aside her "personal considerations" and forego her feminine sunshades and tears (7). Tommy's willingness to carry her body in such a way that she crosses typical gender roles makes her a successful transregional athlete, whereas Jessica cannot truly embody this code switching role.

Transnational Identity, Race, and Cycling

In "Nation, Region, and Empire," Amy Kaplan asks how American regionalism and transnationalism might be understood in tandem, as numerous nineteenth-century authors wrote about the ways that international conflicts, such as the Spanish-American War, shaped domestic policy. W.E.B. DuBois, for instance, "linked domestic and colonial racial oppression in his prescient declaration in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), originally written for the first Pan-African Congress" (249). Authors such as Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, and Theodore Roosevelt connected international conflicts and

policies with specific regions of the United States, imbuing places like the South or the West with certain racial associations. Kaplan notes that authors like Sutton Griggs "highlight an important intersection in the 1890s between domestic racial strife and the acquisition of an overseas empire in Cuba and the Philippines" (248). In other words, racial attitudes in American regional writing were often influenced by transnational conflicts. This notion brings me to Fanny Bullock Workman's writing, travel narratives about bicycling across Europe and Asia. Much like "Tommy the Unsentimental," Workman the cyclist masters regional space through physical exertion. Furthermore, she establishes her Americanness in contrast to the regions she finds herself in—small towns in Spain in the work that I will discuss in this chapter. Workman travels across Spain in the years immediately preceding that Spanish-American War and her writing makes it clear that she considers many of the Spanish people she passes to be the Other, despite the fact that Spain was another colonizing country with imperial ambitions. Her descriptions of the Spanish people she encounters and her attitudes towards the Other seem to support Kaplan's premise that "[i]n the new frontier of the empire, the nation could be reimagined as Anglo-Saxon in contrast to the inferior races of Cubans and Filipinos, who were identified with African Americans at home and considered equally incapable of self-government" (248). In another example of regional affiliation, Workman is constantly claimed as "Worcester's own" in U.S. newspapers throughout the 1890s. Regardless of her efforts to fashion a transnational identity, forces beyond her control attempt to impose a regional identity on Workman.

In this section, I consider the relationship between gender, athletics, and the mutability of identity in Fanny Bullock Workman's cycling narrative *Sketches Awheel in*

Modern Iberia. I argue that in her cycling narratives the bicycle becomes a vehicle for troubling conceptual regional borders and for traversing a transnational imaginary. This is because of the bike's vexed relationship to feminine embodiment; a bike is at once a threat to traditional views of femininity and also an acceptable facilitator of white feminine mobility. In her works, Workman presents her bicycle as a kind of cosmopolitan vehicle for superior belonging. She has a tendency to fix other people into local and national identities while insisting on her own cosmopolitan ability to move between them. It is Workman's athleticism, in part, that allows her to do this; she uses her athleticism as a literary strategy for self-invention and establishes her physical strength as proof of her racial superiority.

Workman's athletic achievements create an impressive record. In the late-nineteenth century she broke several mountaineering records and cycled across numerous countries with her husband. Furthermore, she wrote prolifically about her endeavors as part of her fight against stereotypes about athletic and mobile women in the nineteenth century. The athletic accomplishments and arduous nature of Workman's travel, particularly for a woman in the 1890s, are difficult to overestimate. Workman wrote about her global adventures and athletic achievements. During a time when athletic women were still largely considered abnormal, overly masculine, or gender-bending freaks, Workman normalized and even celebrated her daring and fitness. And while her name is rarely recognized today, she was well-known in her own time. Her competition with Annie Peck to break mountaineering records made newspaper headlines regularly. Workman set multiple altitude records and later became the first American woman to give a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society about her athletic accomplishments

(Pauly 31). All of this is even more striking when one reads about the poor road conditions or lack of roads altogether on cycling trips, the heavy tools the couple had to carry, the bodily exposure to the elements they withstood for months on end, and the less-than-rugged equipment that often malfunctioned when they were riding.

Workman grew up in a privileged family in Worcester, Massachusetts in the late-nineteenth century. Her father, Alexander Hamilton Bullock, was a former Governor of the state and her mother's family was one of the wealthiest in Massachusetts (Pauly 33). Because of this wealth, Fanny Bullock was able to attend elite schools in New York, Paris, and Dresden. She became multilingual during her years abroad and gained a fondness for international travel (Pauly 33). Upon returning to the United States after school, Fanny married William Hunter Workman, a well-to-do doctor eleven years her senior. The two had a daughter and, later, a son who wouldn't survive, but the couple rarely mentions their children in their works. Two years into the marriage, William retired from his job and the two decided to cycle the world. They left their daughter in the care of a nurse in Europe and set out on their adventures (Pauly 34-35). After each cycling trip the Workmans wrote a book describing their adventures, though Fanny is typically considered the primary author of these accounts.[32] Fanny's attention to mobility in these works and her meticulously crafted authorial identity reveals the degree to which she uses sport to move between cultural and social registers. She reaffirms her physical abilities and citizen-of-the-world persona, which allow her to access regions that (white) woman normally could not; however, she moves through spaces by positioning herself

[32] All of the Workman's publications listed both Fanny and William as the authors, despite the popular opinion that Fanny was the primary author, according to Pauly (36). William Workman provides Fanny credibility as an author through marital association.

against a backdrop of racialized people who stay still—literally, in some of the photographs included in the memoir.

In *Sketches Awheel* the bike facilitates Workman's interactions with other people. She writes, "The tour was made on bicycles, not to satisfy the spirit of adventure commonly ascribed to Americans…but as being the means of conveyance best adapted to our purpose, enabling us in entire independence of the usual hindrances of the traveler to pass through the country at leisure, stopping where and when we pleased" (v). In other words, the safety of a bike allows the Workmans to have intimate encounters with Spain's people in ways that travel by train would not. These encounters certainly made them more aware of their Americanness, and the differences between themselves and the people they were cycling past. Their ability to penetrate lesser-visited towns seems to bolster their own racial and ethnic superiority. For instance, Workman notes that:

> The backwardness of the people of Aragon…is very noticeable. Not only have they little idea of cleanliness, modern comfort, and mode of life, but they seem stupid, and evidently come less in contact with the outside world than the inhabitants of the provinces mentioned. They,…notably the women, stared like cattle. The men and boys could not keep their hands off our bicycles, ringing the bells, feeling the tyres, and pressing the saddles as if these vehicles were on exhibition for their particular entertainment and instruction (235).

For Fanny, the bicycle is a vehicle to facilitate her travel and sometimes exploitative tourism. As an American who enters and leaves spaces with little thought to her privilege and the mobility her race and ethnicity afford her, she separates herself—calm, reserved, and knowledgeable—from the "primitive," uncultured display over the bicycle. She

cannot claim her status as a citizen-of-the-world if she engages in the same spectacle over the novelty of the bicycle that the residents of Aragon do.

In many passages, Workman's writing echoes some of the characteristics that are sometimes associated with regional sketches published in the U.S. at the time. She details the behaviors of the Spanish, often depicting them as simple or backwards, and discusses the ancient history of the country. As Amy Kaplan and other scholars have pointed out, there is a tendency in regional literature to erase recent histories and reclaim or romanticize medieval pasts. *Sketches Awheel* traffics heavily in romanticized descriptions of medieval Spain and ancient Moorish architecture, while occasionally pointing out the crumbling infrastructure and poor quality of life in the present.[33] There are no references to the escalating political tensions between Spain and the United States, even though *Sketches Awheel* was published months before the start of the Spanish-American War. Despite the silence on this conflict, it would be short-sighted to assume that Workman's descriptions of rural, and often darker skinned, Spaniards did not affect American attitudes towards race and ethnicity. The narrative reads more like a natural history, detailing everything that Bullock-Workman sees and that is exotic to her about other places. The bike, though not the primary focus, is important because it allows Fanny to observe people and places off the routine tourist track. These observations manifest a tension in her writing between a genuine desire for other Americans to explore the

[33] Workman writes that "[o]ne looks in vain for anything distinctive either in the people or towns between Port Bou and Figueras" (7). Similarly, the "country between Figueras and Gerona is undulating, sparsely inhabited, and uninteresting. In two of the towns passed through the children were very annoying, running after us, screaming and throwing stones" (9). Alicante, as a whole, is a "dust heap" (71). Barcelona, in Workman's opinion, is not "particularly attractive," its parks "do not compare with many we have mentioned," the streets have a "very undeveloped appearance," and its sea front warehouses lack vitality and are "depressing" (17-18). Conversely, Workman praises ancient ruins and forts, calling the Alhambra a grand artistic creation. She includes multiple photographs of old monasteries in the text, and she often writes of towns, like Tarifa, as "romantic…with its well-preserved walls and *alcazar*" (130).

beautiful places she describes and a repulsion by what she sees as "primitive" and less civilized.

The late 1890s were a particularly rocky period in Spain as far as national identity was concerned. Spain was losing many of its overseas holdings in different conflicts, launching "a phase of identitary shipwreck…During this phase, renewed forms of Spanish nationalism assumed the task of regenerating the homeland, deploying multiple tactics to counter the rise of sub-state nationalism" (Moreno-Luzon and Seixas 4). In other words, a country that had maintained a particularly strong sense of nationalism throughout the nineteenth century was now grappling with growing sectionalism and fractures within its borders. Workman and her husband cycled across the country, traversing large swaths of land and moving between multiple Spanish regions, sometimes on roads maintained by the state and other times by local "caminos reales" (Workman xiv). By using the ancient Greek name for Spain—Iberia—in the title of her work, Workman erases the national identity Spain had established over the past century and reinforces regionalism. Doing this allows Workman to regionalize herself; she meticulously details the differences between the people she encounters across different provinces and sets herself apart from them.[34]

In her descriptions of some of the more remote places that she travels, Workman's sense of belonging and otherness collide and readers can see her attempting to use the

[34] Workman code switches throughout the memoir in ways that cause class and athletic ability to intersect. As Workman notes, "Cycling has become popular among the better classes in Spain…In various parts of Spain, but especially in Andalucia, Catile, and Leon, we received, from cyclists who were entire strangers to us, courtesies and attentions which added to the pleasure and interest of our trip" (Sketches 202-03). When the Workmans encounter other well-to-do cyclists, they become equals, sharing coffee and beers and sightseeing together. Workman remarks on one cyclist's job as a professor and repeats that she "admired [his] endurance" (Sketches 214). However, in encountering non-cyclists and lower-class Spaniards in other regions, Workman maintains a distance from them. When they offer her beverages or act as tour guides, Fanny projects a detached superiority.

bike as a way to shape her identity and fit in with certain groups when need be or stand apart from the native population when it is more advantageous. When she needs lodging, a local guide, or other favors, Workman encourages others to look on in wonder at her bike. She seems happy to answer their questions and fans their curiosity. Conversely, when she wants to set herself apart as superior and American, she derides curiosity as it pertains to her bicycle, as we saw in the passage about Aragon. Frequently, Workman presents the bike as a vehicle with a space of its own. When crowds look on during tire fixes, they swarm around Workman, making space for the bicycle. When the couple finds lodging, there is often a room in which they leave their vehicles, a room whose purpose is to house the bikes:

> During the night we were dimly conscious in our sleep of a tremendous uproar, as of a mob, in the midst of which the word bicicletas was repeatedly heard. We had left our bicycles as we supposed securely locked up in the entrance room, having been assured no one would touch them, so the noise did not cause anxiety enough to awaken us. When we came to put the luggage on in the morning one of the handle-bars was found twisted around and the brake damaged. The cause of the tumult was now evident. A number of the townspeople had been admitted to view these curiosities, the like of which had probably never been seen in Jijona before, and in the consequent excitement they had tried to mount them with the result described (*Sketches* 70).

The bicycle helps Workman to fit in and attract attention when she needs it, but it also sets her apart because of the separate space that it demands and creates. The oddity of the bicycle in some of the rural places that she cycles through contrasts with Workman's

modernity. She is cosmopolitan, worldly, mobile, and modern, while the regional people that she passes are stuck in the premodern past.

As Workman cycles across the globe and describes the people that she encounters, usually in essentialized and fixed terms, she works to represent her identity as constantly in flux with a multiplicity that she must negotiate. She tries to avoid aligning herself with one fixed national identity, instead comparing herself to other countrymen at various points in her writing. She notes that Spanish natives often took the couple to be French or English, and she makes little effort to correct them. When she describes parts of Spain in particularly romantic terms, Workman talks about how she is fully immersed in her own "Quioxtian" adventure. At another point, one of their lodging hosts is excited to introduce the Workmans to their "countryman," an English man. Workman writes that upon meeting him, "It was as a brother rather than as a countryman that we felt like greeting the tall, manly young Englishman in that out-of-the-way corner of Spain" (*Sketches* 50). She aligns herself with this stranger along familial lines but seems more hesitant to associate with him through connections of nationality. Her constant movement on the bike allows her to view her identity as malleable, while she positions the other people in her works as stagnant. While she constantly refers to an "authentic" Spanish identity that the natives of the country possess, she appears to excuse herself from any notion of an "authentic" Americanness.

These national alignments also often appear in Workman's subtle language shifts. When the couple encounters travelers from places like England, France, or Germany, Workman's pronoun use changes to an inclusive "we" or "us." For Fanny, race is important and she selectively aligns with or distances herself from others on this basis.

She situates herself as sometimes German, sometimes English, sometimes American, and so on. In addition to her pronoun use, Workman intersperses her narratives with words from the language of the country she is biking through. In the text *Algerian Memories*, for example, Fanny switches between English and French frequently, with no transition from one to the other. She offers no translations for her readers. Similarly, in *Sketches Awheel*, Spanish words and phrases dot every page and paragraph, and simply become part of the narrative. According to one nineteenth-century review of her book, the changes in language weaken her text: "Foreign words are too much in evidence: in the space of three sentences we notice Spanish, German, and French" ("Travels Far" 15). Workman uses language to project specific racial groupings for herself. She aligns herself with Germanic countries through languages and first person possessive pronouns. Workman wants to both racialize herself—as long as that racialization is Teutonic—and simultaneously establish herself as a modern citizen-of-the-world, all through her use of languages and pronouns.

In addition to her preoccupation with ethnic identity, Workman alludes to her own gender rather subtly. She tends to describe the roles and behaviors of non-American women in demeaning or childlike ways. Readers see the intersection of race, class, and gender in Workman's descriptions of other women, as their lack of mobility due to their class and race changes the way she sees them. In fact, one of the most striking passages in *Sketches Awheel* comes when Workman depicts a side excursion to Morocco. She writes that:

> The only women visible anywhere were slaves… More than the rare tapestries, mosaics, and old weapons, we admired the bright pretty slaves, who made

> exquisite pictures as in white and pink muslins with bright sashes over their shoulders and bare arms decked with bangles they silently passed *café maure* and sweets. We asked Salem [their guide] if the negro slaves in Tetuan were usually so attractive, when he shook his head saying 'B— is a connoisseur and buys only the handsomest.' He also said the slave girls are treated with great kindness, being cared for like members of the family, which statement corresponded with the impression made upon us by their appearance and bearing. Feeling as if we had lived through a scene in the Arabian Nights we bade our host farewell (122).

Here, Workman's mobility allows her to inhabit what she deems an exotic space and treat the situation like a work of fiction. Fanny moves through this space as a tourist and looks at the slave women as entertainment. She "admired" them and aligns the slaves with fictional tales that date back centuries, once again eliding any recent past or conflict. She focuses on her own privileged enjoyment of the aesthetics of it all. And then she is free to leave and adapt to other identities. Her bicycle and ability to be mobile serve as an imperializing force throughout her travels.

Though *Sketches Awheel* provides a number of descriptions of women in Spain and North Africa, there are few references to Workman's own femininity. She focuses sparingly on her own body as she engages in athletic adventures, even though she was outspoken about equal rights for women in other aspects of her life--or at least white, middle-class women. In descriptions of the bodily threats that the Workmans encountered on their travels, Workman glosses over sexual threats. The most explicit point she makes in the whole of *Sketches Awheel* is to say that, "Barcelona is not a pleasant place for a woman to visit with a bicycle on account of the great number of rough mechanics and

labourers at all times on the streets. Still, as for that matter, even in regulation street gown she cannot walk a block alone without being rudely spoken to" (19). While her mobility helps her to claim some of the male privileges of movement, she is unable to escape the fact that she is a woman out in public and always subject to the male gaze.

As this example bears out, in spite of her best efforts, Workman was not always in control of the identities imposed upon her. While she may have attempted to write herself into a performance of national fluidity, newspapers in the United States vigorously claimed her as their own, not unlike how the Old Boys claimed Tommy as their own. At the turn of the twentieth century, headlines and articles about Workman abounded and common accounts read like the following from *The Massachusettes Ploughman:* "Mr. and Mrs. Workman, who, by the way, are Americans, devoted five years to this exploration in India" ("Literature" 2). *The Rocky Mountain News* declares, "Mrs. Fanny Bullock Workman and her husband…are Americans, but when not traveling they live in England" ("Mrs. Workman"). *The Literary World* notes, "There is much, very much in this book by an American husband and his wife to commend it to the attention and the liking of American and English readers" ("Sketches Awheel" 174). These examples are not the exception. In combing through various digital newspaper databases, I encountered article after article that reference Fanny's father and his position as Governor when he was alive, William's degree from Harvard, and their connections to Worcester, Mass. The couple is typically identified as American within the first few sentences of these articles, usually before their accomplishments are even stated. They are called "Worcester people," continuing a tradition in literature of viewing New England as the "real"

America. Newspapers and sports writers had taken on the task of making the Workman's relatable to New England audiences by trafficking in sameness.

Race and Cycling

As Fanny Bullock Workman's travel narratives show, cycling could be used as a vehicle for superior, white, feminine mobility. But, what happens when the cyclists themselves, rather than the people passed by the bikes, are black women? In this section I consider Pauline Hopkins's 1900 novel *Contending Forces*, and the responses in newspapers to Kittie Knox's cycling to show how black women do not get to move through region. Knox is a historical figure who illustrates the limitations for black female riders in the Boston region in the 1890s. Hopkins is an author whose Bostonian characters attempt to achieve the same cultural literacy that white characters like Tommy have, but without overwhelming success. Knox participates in bicycle racing, whereas the cycling Hopkins's characters do is a comic failed ride, not one undertaken for competition. I put these two in conversation with one another because both Knox and Hopkins's characters understand the power of costume to traverse certain boundaries.

Both Kittie Knox and Hopkins's Ophelia Davis attempt to resist meaning imposed on black cyclists through their cycling outfits. Their efforts, though seemingly minor, echo Foucault's explanations of resistance and power in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*. Fetterley and Pryse point out that Foucault sees "resistance as a 'multiplicity of points'" (qtd. in Fetterley and Pryse 7). He argues further that resistances "are distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups of individuals in a definitive way" (qtd. in Fetterley and Pryse 7). Though Foucault uses the term fashion to mean "an

irregular manner" here, the aesthetic meaning of the word works too. For some black, female cyclists in 1890s Boston, fashion was a "mobile and transitory point of resistance" (qtd. in Fetterly and Pryse 7). It was the means by which they could begin to assimilate with audiences and crowds culturally, geographically, or racially different from themselves.[35]

Kittie Knox's experience demonstrates the difficulty non-white women had even accessing the same spaces that white women were able to access on bicycles. Knox was a biracial woman from Boston who was deeply interested in and involved with the cycling community there. She belonged to the black cycling club in Boston, the Riverside Cycling Club, and joined the League of American Wheelman (LAW) in the early 1890s before a "color line" was instated in 1894. At a national LAW cycling event in 1895 Knox was denied entry, despite showing her membership card (Finison 29). Technically, the LAW rules only barred *new* non-white members, but this rule was still cited to keep Knox and other existing black members from participating in races. Papers from across the country were fascinated by Knox and reported her barring, though with contradictory storylines. Some papers said that Knox timidly walked away from the LAW event while others noted that she put up a protest, rode in figure eights in front of the race headquarters, and was eventually allowed in (Finison 30-31). Much as Massachusetts papers claimed Workman as their own, many Boston-area papers were "solidly in Kittie's corner," calling her "Boston's own" (Finison 35). Because Knox was a figure written about frequently in the mid-late 1890s, it is rather likely that Hopkins herself was familiar

[35] Cather does not describe Tommy's outfit, but Workman includes pictures of herself in her memoir wearing an ankle-length skirt and full-sleeve, collared shirts. Her outfits draw attention to her class standing, as she is typically pictured in front of huts or poor natives of the countries through which she is traveling.

with Knox's story. Of even more interest is the way that both Knox and Ophelia Davis, use clothing to assume resistant, transregional identities. Knox was aware of the barriers she faced as a black, female cyclist and attempted to slide through the cracks in some of those barriers through her dress.

Knox was an accomplished seamstress and sewed many of her own cycling outfits—typically bloomers, not skirts. Knox's self-made outfits won her several prizes at racing events and the praise of several papers; the *New York Herald Tribune* declared that "[i]f she has a garment which women can wear on the wheel comfortably and gracefully, she ought to be hailed as a benefactor by all haters of the unaesthetic, whether or not they are able to preserve their equilibrium on the bicycle" ("Untitled"). Here the implication is that Knox could alter her outfit and assume a more graceful air as a result of that change—a valuable tool to hold as a woman in a largely male-dominated field. However, as Ophelia Davis also realizes in *Contending Forces*, blackness prevents athletic women from code switching to the extent that white women are able. After Knox won one of the costume contests she entered, a number of onlookers hissed at her. While some claimed that the hissing was due to Knox's "masculine" knickerbockers, Charles Percival, a LAW representative, told a *New York Times* reporter that they hissed because "we had given the prize to a colored girl" ("May Be"). Race and dress come into conflict again for Knox at a ball described in a *New York Times* article:

> The pretty and young cycling women down here all wear the walking-length skirts, and the costume that the bloomerites call irrational. That is all the pretty ones except the mulatto girl from Boston, Miss Kitty Knox….She wears bloomers and is so very attractive that a lot of white men wearing [LAW] colors, and who

had as well been in some other business, are constantly dancing attendance on her" ("Fine Racing").

The attention given to her as a black woman by white men at the ball was enough to cause an uproar, and dozens of white women threatened to quit the LAW if Knox was not immediately barred from all events going forward. It did not matter that, according to *The Referee and Cycle Trade Journal*, she wore "a large leghorn hat, a pink waist and a black skirt" to this ball ("Two Dark"). Her outfit choices afforded Knox some degree of acceptance within the cycling community, particularly because they modeled a more practical riding costume that all women cyclists could benefit from. Knox understood how and when to alter her dress in order to better fit into a particular situation, but the responses to her skin color illustrate that there were limits to Knox's self-styling.

Hopkins herself was intimately involved with theater and minstrelsy throughout her life, illustrating her recognition of racial and class code switching. Hopkins performed with the Hopkins Colored Troubadours, writing and acting in several plays for the troupe. Several of the performances that Hopkins penned combined hyperbolic stereotypes from minstrel shows and more thoughtful facets of serious theater (Wallinger 36). When performing for white audiences, the "authentic" scenes of blackness that she felt compelled to act out often troubled Hopkins. However, she used the fact that white audiences craved "authenticity" to her advantage and subverted meaning in plays she wrote throughout her career (Wallinger 34-36). In her biography of Hopkins, Hanna Wallinger discusses Hopkins's ability to writes for multiple audiences, nothing that "Hopkins...uses the minstrel model, exposes its ridiculous hyperbole, and subverts it with her own message" (36). It is clear from her experience with theater that Hopkins

understood the value of performance and proved adept at writing characters whose identities and words change depending on their particular circumstance. In the case of minstrel shows, Hopkins knew how to alter the shows differently for black and white audiences, showcasing the cultural flexibility of her characters.

In *Contending Forces*, this same class performativity appears in the form of Hopkins's character Ophelia Davis. The action of the novel revolves around a black family, the Smiths, that owns a boardinghouse in Boston shortly after the Civil War. Ophelia Davis is a former slave from Louisiana who attains freedom after the war ends and moves north with her friend Sarah Ann White to open their own laundering business. They rent space in the Smith's boardinghouse, deeming the other boarders intelligent and respectable, and their business becomes quite popular. Ophelia, specifically, recognizes the advantages afforded to women who are able to switch registers fairly easily. Perhaps it is unsurprising given her occupation, but fashion is important to Ophelia Davis as a productive way to move across boundaries and interact with different groups more effectively. She describes the questions she receives from people about how she affords the lace shawls and gold watches that she wears to church on a cook's salary: "Yas'm, when my ol' mistis left her great big house an' all that good stuff-silver an' things-a-layin' thar fer enyone to pick up that had sense 'nough to know a good thing an' git it ahead of enybody else, I jes' said to myself: 'Phelia, chile, now's yer time!...Sarah Ann, you stuffed yerself with greenbacks, but, honey, I took clo's" (105). Ophelia reappropriates the dresses once owned by her white mistress and wears them in an effort to renegotiate her class identity. In her eyes, clothing offers more value than money does. Through her clothing, Ophelia is able to move between domestic work spaces, like

kitchens, and public spaces, like churches, with ease. This "sense," or understanding that the way she holds herself and dresses can help her cross certain boundaries, extends to her athleticism. When Ophelia Davis is cycling, her class performativity is most openly on display.

In the novel, Ophelia and Mr. James begin by riding bikes in the kitchen, linking them to domestic labor and a lower class via space. As Mr. James teaches Ophelia how to ride a bike, though, they venture outside to a park to ride. Athletic ability facilitates a change in place, from a domestic space to a public sphere. It is only when Ophelia is a capable rider that she ventures outside. Hopkins describes the scene, writing:

> All this spring he's been a-ridin' me on his bike down in the kitchen every day after we got through washin' an' had cleaned up, so I could go ridin' with him in the Fens an' all out o' town this summer. After I'd learnt, one day he came in with a beautiful bike an' saddle. The nex' day we was ter ride ter the Park. I hed on my new pale blue bicycle suit with a pink shirtwaist an' a white sailer hat an' tan colored shoes an' gloves. Mr. Jeemes had on a black suit with a gray linen duster, an' he did look extinguished in his beaver hat an' that white choker an' tie o' hisn which I must say I do admire (365-67).

Once out in public and the owner of a new bike that Mr. James gave her, Ophelia Davis describes the details of her outfit. She meticulously notes that her riding outfit is new, emphasizing all the accoutrements—gloves, a hat, and a nice shirt. She also describes Mr. James's suit; however, in using "extinguished" rather than "distinguished" in regard to his appearance, Ophelia's class performance falters. It seems that the clothing she wears is not enough to hide her illiteracy and lack of cultural literacy.

As Ophelia and Mr. James begin to bike, the limits of a black female athlete's identity performance come into full view when they crash. Ophelia describes the effects of the crash, saying, "I tore my gloves, los' my hat, an' busted a new pair o' corsets right off me. Besides thet, I nearly swallowed my upper teeth, an' I lost my bangs…I 'clar to you them corsets was no good never after thet; an' it cost me ten dollars to fix thet upper set o' teeth so I could wear 'em agin; I never have seen them bangs sence" (367-68). This dismantling of each material marker of class curbs Ophelia's ability to fully traverse boundaries on her bicycle in the same way Tommy or Fanny Workman are able to. Her new, class-inflected clothing is torn, her hair is askew, and it is revealed that she has (now broken) fake teeth. While she attempts to reassemble her appearance to mirror what it was before the crash—"fixing [herself] up a bit," paying to fix her teeth—her bangs never do grow back and her corsets are never good again after the fall (367). Her middle-class markers prove to be merely temporary, while the marks of her failed identity performance are more permanent. Incidentally, the cause of this crash is Mr. James's clothing—his linen duster gets stuck in the bicycle pedals. Not only does the performance fail for both characters, but the material markers of the performance, the clothing, are the mechanism for that failure. Moreover, Mr. James's speed on the bicycle brings Pierre Bourdieu's writing on sport and class to mind. He posits that "the bourgeois treats his body as an ends, makes his body a sign of its own ease. Style is thus foregrounded, and the most typically bourgeois deportment can be recognized by…a restrained, measured, self-assured tempo. This slow place, contrasting with working-class haste or petit-bourgeois eagerness, also characterizes bourgeois speech" (*Distinction* 215). Rather than exhibiting a slow, self-assured tempo on the bicycle, Ophelia and Mr. James were quickly

"coasting." Neither their bodies during the bicycle adventure nor their verbal responses afterwards are measured or restrained.

Notably, Mr. James ends the bicycle ride with a fall into a pile of sand that changes his appearance from black to white. Ophelia exclaims that, "The furst thing I knowed he was a-stickin' fast head fust into a pile o' sand where they was makin' mortar to build a cellar, an' me on top o' him!...Jeemes is purty black, but he was a white man when he got out o' thet san' heap" (367). If there was any question about the performance happening in this scene, Hopkins quashes it by explicitly drawing attention to it here, describing a sort of short-lived white-face minstrelsy. In other words, the intersections of race and class cannot be extricated from one another when considering the athleticism of women of color. Ophelia Davis's race precludes her from performing a certain class identity that white cyclists can enact more successfully. Ultimately, black, female cyclists work to alter their identities and traverse certain boundaries, but those traversals prove to be temporary and ephemeral. Hopkins mocks the idea of class mobility through the failed cycling rides of her characters, and in the process reveals that black women cannot penetrate or pass through region.

As authors and their characters moved into the twentieth century, the limits of female athleticism were coming into greater focus. With an increased ease of movement across borders came an awareness about who could and could not cross those lines. Race and class differences could be masked through athleticism only to a certain extent. Women's traversal of different landscapes was shown to be ephemeral for many athletes. As the twentieth century descended upon the United States, authors began to include depictions of athletics happening in carefully designed, artificial spaces. To this point,

regional literature has dealt closely with natural landscapes and women's movement through the outdoors. However, as authors begin to turn to other genres of literature, like the College Girl novel, a lot of athletic activities are relocated to indoor, manmade spaces, like gymnasiums. In the next chapter I will consider the ways that artificial spaces affect which athletic bodies are deemed acceptable, as well as how whiteness and Americanness become conflated through women's athletics.

CHAPTER 5

"THAT STIRRING CRY OF RIGHT GUARD:" ATHLETICS, RACE, AND SPACE IN COLLEGE GIRL NOVELS

At the start of Edith Bancroft's *Jane Allen* series (1917-1922), the titular character is introduced as a cowgirl, a natural-born athlete who understands little about other girls. She has spent her entire life in Montana with her father and aunt, largely separated from other people her age. When her father tells her that she will be attending Wellington College on the East coast, she expresses her deep dissatisfaction with this plan. Jane has a preconception of the university and the girls she will encounter there, thinking that "[s]he was going away from her beloved Western trails to a place where girls were eminently proper and knew nothing of the joy of racing over hill and dale on the back of a horse" (*Sub Team* 18). When the reader first meets Jane, she is fiercely independent, has no interest in working with others, and possesses little sense of what a community looks like. Her sense of autonomy translates to athletics; initially Jane does not see the value of engaging in athletics with others. She foregoes basketball tryouts, considering sport an endeavor meant to be undertaken alone. As Bancroft describes it, "[w]hen she had enrolled as a student of Wellington College, Jane had not wished to become friendly with any of her fellow-students" (*Sub Team* 185), instead choosing to ride her horse alone, "bent only on putting distance between herself and Wellington" (*Sub Team* 295). However, her time at Wellington sees Jane change her mind about basketball and quickly become part of the team. Through this athletic involvement she learns to value

community and belonging in a larger group. She becomes active in student government and brings those same democratic values to the basketball court. Jane's college journey is just a microcosm of the larger project of citizen-making through athletics in turn-of-the-century literature. By the end of the *Jane Allen* series in the early-1920s, sport and region take a backseat to a post-War nationalism, a democratic spirit that would not have been achievable without the community that sport engendered amongst the women in college fiction.

This chapter explores athletics as citizen-making in a literary genre that was at its height from the 1890s through the 1920s—the College Girl novel. Stories and novel series about women's time at university accompanied the shift and rise in attendance from seminary-style schools to more traditional colleges for women. Both short story collections and novel series remained popular through the end of the first World War, at which point the literary treatment of athletic women changed and faded for a period. In this chapter I focus on literature about students at women's colleges until the mid-1920s. More specifically, I consider the ways that the space of the university—and specifically the athletic spaces—are framed as democratic ones in which women from across regions teach one another how to be honorable citizens.

Heroines of college series, like Jane Allen and Grace Harlowe, constantly urge their peers to make the right choices and do what is best for the larger student body, not just themselves. Due process is encouraged when students commit wrongs. The college girls are considered paragons of just and humane behavior towards all. Even when they commit wrongs, the girls always come to realize the error of their ways, usually with guidance from their peers. Elsie Noble, for instance, eavesdrops on Jane and her friends,

but then confesses to her offence. She "did not spare herself or even attempt to palliate her own offenses. She…expressed an honest and sincere contrition for them which showed plainly that her feet were at last planted upon the solid ground of right. She was no longer the 'ignoble Noble'" (*Right Guard* 285). It is no coincidence that many of these heroines are sports stars on campus who recognize the importance of athletic spaces as training ground for these democratic qualities. Basketball courts and fields seemingly represent equality, social reform, morality, and the desire to always do good. As it happens, though, public conversations were taking place at the start of the twentieth century about how the rhetoric of character refigured the cultural meaning of the racialized body (Salazar 159). The athletic spaces in College Girl novels are racially coded, only allowing entrance as athletic participants to some women. Black, Asian, and Native American characters are usually left unnamed and are allowed into gymnasiums only as mascots during sports games. College girl novels lay out a narrow assimilationist narrative, promoting the woman-citizen ideal through "democratizing" athletic spaces, but revealing the ways that eugenics and sport are all too closely linked in this literature.

I begin with a brief history of women's higher education in the early-twentieth century before shifting to a consideration of college athletics during this time period. I then turn to literature that deals closely with women's college athletics, College Girl novels—fiction written for adult audiences, primarily by white women who also graduated from all-women's schools, about the lives of women at universities. As Shirley Marchalonis notes, the authors of this fiction typically refer to their characters as girls, but that this denotes "a stage in female development…and the term in context is not one of belittlement, but a definition of an age and status group" (7). I follow her example in

this chapter; I use the term "college girls" simply to mean young adult women who are in college.

As I discuss college fiction, I consider the importance placed on shared identities within communal athletic spaces. While many sports were played at universities, this chapter will largely focus on basketball, the most popular women's sport at the time. Much of the College Girl fiction deals with this particular activity. The latter half of my chapter draws on several works to think through athletics as both citizen-making and exclusionary: two series—Edith Bancroft's *Jane Allen* series and Jessie Graham Flowers's *Grace Harlowe* (1910-1924) series—as well as several short story collections—*College Girls* (1895) by Abbe Carter Goodloe, *Vassar Stories* (1907) by Grace Margaret Gallaher and *Smith Stories* (1900) by Josephine Dodge Bacon.[36] I consider how spaces in college fiction that are posed as egalitarian highlight whiteness and cast that whiteness as a precondition for Americanness. Women of color serve as mascots during events, bestowing subjecthood on others, but cannot themselves assimilate as athlete-citizen.

The Rise of Women's Colleges and College Athletics

While women attended private universities as early as the 1830s, they did not regularly enter institutions of higher learning until the mid-late nineteenth century. In 1861 Vassar College opened its doors, ushering in the age of higher education for

[36] In "Plucky Little Ladies and Stout-Hearted Chums: Serials Novels for Girls, 1900-1920," Jane Smith describes the market for serial novels. She writes, "As a publishing venture, the new series were an offshoot of the serials for boys which had begun to flourish in the late-nineteenth century" (155). Several large publishing houses, like the Henry Altemus Company and Cupples & Leon Publishing advertised these series and "crank[ed] them out," filling a void in the market with books that independent, modern young women, past their adolescent years, who went out into the world and found adventures. "Occasionally one might find a dime novel devoted to a fiery-eyed, pistol-packing heroine like Calamity Jane…but the dime novels were generally too crude to appeal to the middle-class female readers who were the principal audience for the later and costlier serials" (155-56).

women—primarily white women[37]—in the United States. The University of Michigan and Cornell would soon follow Vassar's lead and admit women, but those were co-educational institutes, while Vassar began as a women's college. Vassar was unique at the time, not just because it began as an all-women's school, but because it was not a "seminary-like" school (Gordon 13). Until the 1890s, the most popular type of institution for women in the United States held strictly to Victorian ideals. Schools like Lyon's Mount Holyoke and Willard's Troy Female Seminary offered traditional math and humanities courses, but they also stressed proper conduct and took discipline seriously (Gordon 15). Prayer and religion were important parts of the curriculum at seminary schools, while they were not emphasized to the same degree at universities that moved away from the seminary model. As time progressed, more and more women sought access to education and pushed for their place on college campuses. In 1870, women made up just twenty-one percent of all college attendees, but by 1920, they accounted for nearly half of the students seeking a degree (Gordon 2).

Despite the rapidly growing number of women on campuses, some Americans remained anxious about women's education, believing that an inevitable "effeminization" of universities would occur if women were in attendance. Arguments were made that women's presence would distract men from their studies and upset the balance that men's colleges had struck. When not concerned about men's emasculation if women stepped on

[37] This chapter is focused on women's institutions that were predominantly white, as that is what most of the College Girl fiction is about. However, Historically Black Colleges and Universities were established in larger numbers after the Civil War, and athletic programs thrived at these schools. By the 1890s, football, baseball, track and field, and basketball were all popular sports on campus for men and women. Formal athletic organizations were formed to connect athletes across HBCUs. The ISAA, begun by E.B. Henderson in 1906, was the first all-black athletic conference. It was "a training center that, for decades, was the go-to pool for highly qualified African American referees. While the ISAA included all-black teams throughout the mid-Atlantic regions from every available source, public schools, athletic clubs, churches, and colleges, the ISAA's first event was a track meet held on May 30, 1906, at Howard University" (Cavil 30). The first HBCU athletic conferences were then formed in 1910.

campuses, outspoken critics of women's education made claims that college would harm women's health. Though arguments that athleticism hurt women's reproductive abilities were less frequent than they were earlier in the nineteenth century, doctors were now claiming that education would affect a woman's ability to reproduce, a notion that would also be used in arguments regarding race suicide at the start of the twentieth century. Despite discouragements against attending college, women continued to flock to campuses, searching for opportunities to achieve intellectual and economic independence.

Literature began to reflect the growing popularity of women's sports on college campuses. Sporty heroines dot the pages of short stories and novels about women's colleges; students are shown studying and discussing the rules of sports; women engage in very physical matches, and rabid fans flock to games to cheer on their peers.[38] Fiction about college girls attracted readers from across the country, though the stories were primarily set in the Northeast at single-sex schools modeled on the Seven Sisters colleges. Typically, these works were written by educated white women about other middle-to-upper class white women. There were very few male authors writing within this genre, and limited male characters; however, some women did assume pseudonyms and write novels about college boys—a related, but different genre.[39] While literature

[38] For example, Judith Stearns calls herself a "rabid basket-ball fan" in *Jane Allen of the Sub Team* (173); in *Jane Allen, Center*, "it seemed all Wellington was on the road to Breslin [another college]" to watch the basketball team beat Breslin's team (247). This scene saw "carloads of happy, healthy girls, cheering and yelling their class and college cries, laughing and singing intermittently to the tune of chugging motors" (247); "[N]early all of the students had elected to become ardent fans…Long before the game began the spectators were in evidence. They crowded the gallery and filled the roped-in portion of the playing floor to the last inch of space" (*Sub Team* 298). Even the college president attended the games in the *Jane Allen* series. These scenes are common before games in College Girl novels.

[39] Michael Oriard attempts to explain some of the differences between fiction written about men and women's college experiences, noting that "From Gilbert Patten, Ralph Henry Barbour, and other early writers on, men have written thousands of sports novels for boys with a single plot: a story about

about college women emphasized community and democratic values, Michael Oriard points out that literary college men care overwhelmingly more about personal triumph within college boy novels. Inclusion in a democratic collective via athletics was less important for college boys—they had more avenues for citizen-making than women did at the time, hence their athletic triumphs could be about the individual in ways that women's could not.

Architecture and the College Novel

On the surface, the emphasis placed on community and shared identity in College Girl fiction is reflected in the communal spaces at universities. Yet, college campuses are artificial, planned spaces; not only are these spaces subtly racially coded, but they also aid in the making of an ideal (white) woman-citizen. Shirley Marchalonis, in her discussion of college fiction, sees the space of college tales as "mowed and manicured—controlled, intellectualized, perhaps" (Marchalonis 25). Authors like Bancroft and Flower dedicate substantial amounts of space in their works to describing the physical spaces of college life—dorm rooms, gymnasiums, and cafeterias. Bancroft writes about the effects of space on her heroine, Jane, when she arrives at Wellington College, noting that, "Jane "was still the free, untamed product of the wild, and the prison bars of civilization had not yet closed about her" (*Sub Team* 50-51). Here, Bancroft aligns the university space with civilization, while denoting land outside of it as primitive and wild. Once young women

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achievement in the face of severe competition, with fair play and other virtues conspicuously promoted but with heroic action and triumph overwhelming all other concerns… [they] told the same story over and over about their boy heroes, and their successors have continued the tradition to our own time, but as such competition for girls and women disappeared in the 1920s, opportunities for women writers to develop a feminine sports myth disappeared as well" (10). Oriard notes that turn-of-the-century female writers subtly push against the conventions found in college boys' fiction and place more emphasis on morals, family, and gender relations. Fostering community becomes more important than personal triumph. He also notes that when female writers chose to write within the college boys tradition they "worked against the formula of competition and individualistic achievement central to the boys' sports novel. Indirectly, they encouraged boy readers to imagine a world of heroic possibility that could accommodate the politically weak" (14).

make their way to college campuses, the space tames and manages them. They frequently remark on the importance of dorms, and how the location and size of one's housing dictates the community to which she belongs for the entirety of the four years of school. In Grace Margaret Gallaher's *Vassar Stories* (1900), for example, Lydia feels that, "[d]ifferences of buildings are nearly as differences of miles at College" (212). She thinks to herself that had she "roomed at Strong, where there was a handful of studious, serious girls like herself, she might have been happy at once. If she had roomed in first south, the noisy, lively set which ruled that corridor would have extended to her its friendship, simply because she was…within its precinct" ("The Clan" 185-86). Lydia is left with few friends, while her dormmates remark on how strange it is that she always participates in activities, like ice skating, alone.

The design and layout of women's colleges were carefully considered during the nineteenth century, and perhaps no college better exemplifies the level and thought that went into the spatial organization of campuses than Bryn Mawr. A women's college founded in 1885, Bryn Mawr is one of the Seven Sister Schools—seven women's colleges upon which many of the College Girl novels were based. M. Carey Thomas, Bryn Mawr's president, oversaw the architectural innovations that were put in place on campus. What began as a vision for student self-government and self-regulation materialized in the organization of the buildings and grounds. To help achieve this, Thomas commissioned the architectural firm Cope & Stewardson. Nearly all of the buildings they designed created enclosed courtyard areas that are simultaneously communal and exclusive. As Horowitz notes, "Bryn Mawr not only shed its Victorian skin, but bones as well; monumental masses gave way to walls that enclosed" (124). A

large gateway at the entrance of the campus served as a stark form that clearly delineated the outside world from the enclosed college space. Thomas also discussed planting a ring of trees around the university, effectively closing it off from outsiders.[40] Bryn Mawr shows us how the space of the women's college isolates its students, closing them off from outsiders in the name of protecting them from all that is "uncivilized" outside those bounds.

Bryn Mawr's architectural influence on literature can be seen when Jane Allen first arrives at Wellington College. She is in a taxicab that "turn[s] in through an open gateway of wrought iron upon a broad drive which wound in and out of the vast sheath of velvety green," before seeing an open veranda upon which a large group of women is sitting (*Sub Team* 51). Bryn Mawr and its fictional counterparts regulate access to their interior spaces, only allowing certain bodies into their interiors.

M. Carey Thomas consulted with Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted to design the landscape spaces, a telling move because of their involvement with Central Park's design. This partnership between Olmsted and Bryn Mawr is particularly striking since Olmstead was committed to creating egalitarian public spaces. At Bryn Mawr, Olmstead "laid out athletic grounds in the informal northerly section of the campus that sloped down to Roberts Road and determined that future buildings frame the western perimeter as they had the southern" (Horowitz 126). The connection between Olmsted and athletic spaces seems to suggest that there is a democratic quality to sports, and that

[40] Shirley Marchalonis writes about men's colleges and their depictions in literature, saying that "[c]ontrol of space is noticeably different in fiction about men's colleges. In the collections of men's college narratives published around 1900, young men roam. Harvard men do meet in each other's luxurious rooms, but as well they go to Springfield, to New Haven for the boat race, to dinner parties in Boston, or to an evening of burlesque at the Old Howard…Harvard is not isolated and men were not confined. Even Bowdoin students, who certainly were geographically isolated, have adventures away from their campus" (26).

sporting spaces should be accessible to everybody. In fact, much about the layout of Bryn Mawr shows a campus design seemingly premised on egalitarian, self-governing principles. Yet, the closed off nature of spaces on campus illustrates the way that architecture functioned to "protect" certain students and to keep others away. For instance, "[basketball] spread rapidly in women's schools…where women played the game on small indoor courts, protected from the elements and from public scrutiny. Initially…the court could be any rectangular space marked off by netting or ropes, thus the nickname 'cage game'" (Cahn 85). In *Jane Allen, Center*, when Jane's team travels to play the Breslin basketball team, Jane promises their chauffeur, Tom, that he can come watch that game, to which Clarissa Bradley screams, "'What! A man see us play!'" (249). Clarissa's horrified reaction represents the more prevalent attitude towards interlopers in the gymnasium space, while Jane declares, "'I think we should have a real public game, with everyone invited'" (249). Jane may disagree with Clarissa, but her statement also suggests that "public games" are rare occurrences for the players. The court "protects" women from the elements and the male gaze, but what is implied throughout College Girl novels is that it protected only white women. When they are mentioned, women of color are not afforded the same consideration.

University Spaces and Community Building

From the early pages of the *Jane Allen* novels, the reader is presented with illustrations of active women, in motion and engaged in sport, which are meant to show a community partaking in sport. In *Jane Allen of the Sub-Team* (1920), the first novel in the series, the opening image is of Jane with her horse, which she brought with her from Montana, enjoying an afternoon of riding. However, in subsequent novels, the

illustrations depict multiple women on the basketball court, running and jumping for the ball (see Fig. 5.1). By way of college athletics, Jane has become part of a community, and the novels' images depict this evolution from lone rider to member of a larger team, working together to achieve victory. These illustrations begin to establish that athletics in college novels are meant to model democratic community and thus create a woman-citizen ideal.

Across the fiction about college women, one recurring idea stands out: the playing field (or court) is egalitarian. The desire to do right and the benefits of building community are lauded, and girls who participate in sport do so because they've rightfully earned their positions. Women are encouraged to exemplify a democratic spirit on the basketball court, both through the display of their well-trained bodies and through their treatment of teammates. Recreation theorists at the turn of the century felt that "the gospel of play was itself subordinate to the gospels of belonging, of loyalty, and ultimately of civic membership. Consecrating oneself to the 'ennobling of the state' might seem excessively nationalistic to our ears, but the play reformers were certainly not alone in praising the collective over the individual" (Gleason 16). On the basketball court, young women regulate the behavior of one another and student-led committees monitor and manage the teams to avoid unfair situations on the court. For instance, in *Jane Allen, Right Guard,* a panel of three upperclassmen is appointed to oversee basketball tryouts and choose the sophomore team players. When two of the three judges pick Marian Seaton over Judith Stearns, despite Judith's superior athletic abilities, a conflict erupts. The third judge, Dorothy Martin, resigns until justice triumphs. She is somebody who "presented the calm serenity of one whose integrity cannot be assailed."

AS RIGHT GUARD, JANE PROVED HERSELF WORTHY OF THE POSITION.

Jane Allen: Right Guard. *Page* 225

Figure 5.1, from *Jane Allen, Right Guard*

this trust, Dorothy Martin and her supporters prevail in convincing Marian to relinquish her place on the team to Judith. For the remainder of the season, Selina Brown, a judge and referee, was "a stickler for fair play," having been taught the proper way to enact community membership and impartiality (*Right Guard* 209). There is rarely one authoritative figure, but instead the community comes together to make decisions that are best for the whole body, emphasizing fairness and equality on the court. Even when Marian Seaton has difficulty getting along with her peers, she sets aside those issues on the court. She still "intends to do her best so far as her work on the floor [goes]" (*Sub-Team* 304). In other words, there is something about the playing field itself that is described as almost incorruptible.

When she makes the basketball team after weeks of practice and rule-book studying, a feat which Bancroft notes is strictly merit-based, Jane takes her position as right guard very seriously. In fact, "Jane never forgot that stirring cry of 'Right Guard!' It conveyed to her a higher meaning than mere basket-ball glorification. It fell upon her ears as an admonition to do well. To do right, to be right, and to stay right. It was almost as if she had been elected by her own soul to be a guardian of the right" (*Right Guard* 225-26). Jane's character illustrates the ways that a sense of duty melded with athletics. Because Jane saw her position on the team as symbolic of her obligation to uphold justice, she brought that proclivity for morality to the court. Yet, as I will discuss shortly, the "aryan Amazons" of the College Girl genre ignore that their democratic and moral impulses are set in predominantly white spaces against a backdrop of race suicide anxieties (Fleissner 18). Much like play reformers of the period, when authors within the College Girl genre "imagined collective civic life in America…many of them pictured an Anglo-Saxon

nation nurtured on Anglo-Saxon team games" (Gleason 17). This imagined collective space makes the emphasis on seemingly democratic ideals and egalitarianism all the more jarring in this literature.

Jane Allen leads the charge to truly embody the spirit of "right guard" in Bancroft's series. She is revered and lauded by her peers for her upstanding nature, and even when she is in conflict with other students, she refuses to seek retribution for the wrongs done to her. Rather than taking her problems to authority figures, Jane looks for the good in others and forgives their mistakes. She encourages her friends to do the same when they have issues with other women. When Jane and her friends catch Elsie Noble eavesdropping on them, Jane tells her, "I'm sorry this had to happen, Miss Noble…There's only one thing to do; forget it. We intend to. Won't you? I'm willing to begin over again" (*Right Guard* 138). At another point, when Mrs. Weatherbee wants to punish Marian for bad behavior towards Jane, Jane asks, "Can't this affair be settled now and among ourselves? After all, no great harm has really come of it. We are willing to forget if you are" (*Right Guard* 297). Rather than involving the administration, which Jane's friends encourage her to do at different points in the series, Jane forgives and believes the offender will learn from the experiences. This choice to self-govern, rather than to seek bureaucratic intervention, is in line with the attention on student government and activism in college novels.[41] Jane, class president her sophomore year, is a firm believer in community building and attempts to avoid conflict at every turn, feeling that true justice comes from open conversation and acknowledgment of one's mistakes. She is

[41] As Shirley Marchalonis notes "the authority to run their own world, even within limits, the establishment of governance and judgement systems, and the bestowal of actual authority and power on students created leadership positions for those with managerial talents and political interests" (76).

a protector of less-privileged students and she is vigilant in her quest to guide younger women at Wellington College.

Jane Allen, Grace Harlowe, Betty Wales, and many other college fiction heroines represent the "prominent girl" who does right and turns her attention to social service as her years in college advance (Marchalonis 71).[42] Jane began the series as the Western cowgirl with little community, but as she exemplifies the 'right' behavior on and off the court she moves to the center of the Wellington community and gains influence over the other students. Late in the series, when Jane Allen enrolls in a course that is meant to foster a passion for social service in students, others follow Jane's suit. She extolls the importance of being "prepared with a real, practical working knowledge of the general social side of life, when the day would come for Wellington to give her a degree" (*Senior* 9). In scenes heavily influenced by the recent World War, the students express their passion for helping the "Cause," and working with families in various capacities. Yet, if we examine college fiction more closely, particularly the athletic spaces in such stories, the image of a democratic ideal begins to fray, and readers are left with some troubling views of racial exclusion.

Athletic Outsiders

Characters who do not participate in sports stand out as outsiders and their "apartness" from the rest of the college community is stark. Where the athletic woman was once exceptional, as in Alcott and Cather's works, now the woman who does *not*

[42] The "prominent girl," Marchalonis explains, "appears regularly throughout the turn-of-the-century fiction and the books that follow…[prominence] is the reward for 'right' behavior, and it generates recognition, influence, respect, authority—in short, power. The prominent girl moves from the margins to the center…Achieving prominence, she becomes a role model to others and what she says is listened to with respect" (Marchalonis 71). My argument differs from that of Marchalonis and Gleason because I am applying their insights about "right" behavior or community building to athletic women in College Girl novels. I take their historical analysis of college women and use it to analyze different texts from the 1920s.

participate in athletics is the outsider. In "Room-Mates," from Gallaher's *Vassar Stories,* Molly bemoans her separation from her peers, crying, "'I can't stand my life here. I'm not like most of the girls, I don't care for…athletics'" (37). Similarly, in "The Clan," the girls who do not participate in the group ice-skating activity are singled out. Even Lydia Waitely, who ice skates but does it alone, is diagnosed as "odd" by her peers because "'she skated all the evening alone…She's always by herself'" (*Vassar* 178). Sport is synonymous with community and it is so commonplace for young women to partake in both that those who do not stand out. Women not involved in athletics in some form, even if only as enthusiastic supporters, are constantly on the periphery, often shown living in single-occupancy dorm rooms and seldom having a group of friends with whom to spend time. They are also the characters in which we as readers see the least personal growth and moral development. Sadness subsumes the women who are outside the athletic community. In stories with titles that evoke closeness and community, women who aren't athletically-connected are perhaps the most tragic characters. Without an athletic community, these characters risk losing out on training for that woman-citizen ideal.

Sport fosters community and a pride in the woman-citizen ideal, even when it gets physical. Athletic women were often described in college literature as fierce and unrelenting in their desire to win—a class-based notion, as boxing prostitutes of the 1840s understood the financial and social repercussions of competition and victory. College athletes put their bodies in harm's way to affect a positive outcome of a basketball match or a baseball game. For instance, in "At the First Game," Gallaher describes a basketball player, saying, "Look at Julia, banged already. She has the worst

luck! Last year she broke her nose, and jumped up shouting, 'Come on, I've only blacked my eye.'" (*Vassar* 227). In the same story Gallaher depicts the rough and tumble nature of basketball at Vassar, writing, "The first girl to plunge under [the bench] would strike it with immense force, that of her own impetus and that of the weight of the two girls behind. Basket ball is not fraught with perils; as a rule, a big bruise or a lame ankle being the usual casualties. But, if a girl's head met that iron, something was going to break" (*Vassar* 233). Female characters are not only athletic, but their toughness and athleticism is now celebrated. Daintiness is not regarded like it once was, as Gallaher notes that a young woman, Betty, is "scandalized" by "her friend's [Janet's] weakness" (*Vassar* 233). Janet is a "coward, a cry-baby, a muff" that "wept and shrieked over a cut or a burn" (*Vassar* 233). Janet's pain is such an embarrassment to Betty, a "model athlete, strong, cool, and brave," that she "concealed it as she would have kleptomania" (*Vassar* 234). For these literary athletes, weakness, both physical and emotional, is something that women would rather conceal than acknowledge to their peers. Physical strength, in other words, becomes linked with one's ability to embody the citizen-ideal, concretizing it.

Athletic women's strength is put on display in Abbe Carter Goodloe's story "Revenge," from *College Girls*; in this story, the students' embodiment of the woman-citizen ideal is made all the more clear when it is put into contrast with a male interloper's physical weakness and questionable ethical code. In "Revenge," Goodloe tells the story of college women who read an inaccurate and unflattering article about female athletes at universities. The women invite Jack Newbold, the author, to campus under the guise of learning from his "expertise" on the subject, only to humiliate him when he cannot keep up with them in any of the physical activity they do that day. The

emphasis placed on shared identities within athletic spaces allows College Girl authors to promote women's education while also positioning the man as an interloper. In "Revenge," Newbold's entry onto campus is defined by the space. He pulls into the train station and expects to be picked up in a carriage, but the girls insist that he walk the seven miles to campus to better enjoy the view. The walk is, of course, meant to show how physically fit the girls are, as Newbold tires quickly and thinks to himself that he may not be able to make it all the way to the school. But, the walk also illustrates how closed off the school is to anybody not invited in and shown the way; it clearly positions Newbold as an outsider. One of the students, Miss Thayer, tells Jack that "'I knew you wouldn't have the vaguest idea of how to get up to the college…It's a little longer [to take the walking path] and there is a pretty bad hill'" (173). When they finally reach campus, Miss Thayer points out the tennis courts and instead of entering the cool, interior spaces in which Jack so badly wants to rest, "together they started down the steep hill at the bottom of which stretched the campus" (175). When the women insist that Newbold engage in a round of golf, he thinks that "the links seemed distressingly far off, and the holes absurdly distant from each other…They were on the second round, and Newbold was roughly calculating that his erratic plays had made him walk about three miles, and was wondering if he could live to get up the hill in front of him" (177-79). Next, the girls take Newbold to the running track and mockingly ask what he thinks of the space and its eight laps. These humorous incidents continue as the women shuttle Newbold from place to place and sport to sport until he finally makes up an excuse to leave. Each moment is meant to highlight just how little Newbold knows about female athletics and the level of fitness they require. Simultaneously, though, Goodloe draws attention to how particular

spaces alienate Newbold and hem in the students. Miss Thayer and her friends direct Newbold's every move and usher him into and out of spaces. He cannot enter campus, let alone athletic fields or courts, without the direction of the women.

Racialized Mascots

Authors, through their depictions of athletic women, conflated whiteness, nation, and sport. While this was typically done through character depictions and descriptions of space, some authors also included illustrations in their texts that visually linked race and athletics. For example, Abbe Goodloe Carter's *College Girls* contains ten original drawings done by Charles Dana Gibson. At the end of the nineteenth-century Gibson made famous the "Gibson Girl," a visual representation of the New Woman. Gibson's drawings, which are sketches of fit, middle-class, pulled-together women in athletic settings, are often aligned with white, Christian, native-born womanhood (Patterson 14). The Gibson Girl, Martha Patterson writes, was a threat to "sociopolitical change as a consumer," "an instigator of evolutionary and economic development," and "an icon of successful assimilation into dominant Anglo-American culture," among other things. Patterson also makes the compelling claim that this white archetype is "co-opted by writers deemed Other" and begins to "signal…a protest of, anodyne for, and an appeasement to the ideological imperatives of the dominant icon" (3). While this argument holds true, within the College Girl genre, the Gibson Girl illustrations do little to rebuff that dominant icon. Rather, they are a reflection of one experience, one concept of femininity that served to reinforce the connections between native-born whiteness and sport at universities. The iconic Gibson-style drawings in *College Girls* also connects the college space with middle-class standing, and athleticism for readers. The images found

in *College Girls*—as well as similar illustrations in other college fiction not necessarily done by Gibson—delineate who is allowed to occupy athletic spaces, both within the context of the stories and on the pages of the books themselves.

Whiteness became a prerequisite for citizenship in the College Girl novel, and this is made abundantly clear through the use of racialized mascots. Josephine Dodge Bacon, in "Emotions of a Sub-Guard," describes a gymnasium scene before a basketball game. The different classes are singing and chanting, and a Junior comments to a freshmen that, "'Your songs are great! That 'Alabama Coon' one was awfully good! You make twice the noise that they do!'" (*Smith* 4). This is likely an allusion to a popular late-nineteenth century song about a young slave picking cotton, and it sets up the later entrance of the team mascot—a young black boy. When the freshmen mascot is brought out, Bacon describes him as a minstrel stereotype:

> He was perhaps four years old and the color of a cake of chocolate. His costume was canary yellow—a perfect little jockey suit, with a purple band on his arm adorned with Ninety-yellow's class numerals. He dragged by a twisted cord of purple and yellow a most startling plum-colored terrier, of a shade that never was on land or sea, with a tendency to trip his master up at every step. In the exact middle of the floor the mascot paused, rolled his eyes till they seemed in danger of leaving their sockets, and then at a shrill whistle from the balcony pulled his yellow cap from his wooly head and made a deep and courtly bow to his patrons. But the storm of applause was more than he had been prepared for, and with a wild look about the hall and a frantic tug at the cord he dragged the purple and protesting animal to a corner of the room (*Smith* 8-9).

Even after the boy takes his seat, attention remains on the "little darkey," as Bacon calls him. The onlookers laughed themselves "into something very like hysteria" watching the boy and continued to take pleasure in his "distended eyes" and nervous behavior (*Smith* 9). In this scene, blackness is used as a prop. The boy, outfitted like a jockey, is the butt of a joke for the rest of the student body. Aside from the colors that he wears, he has no connection to the school or the team. His purpose at the game is simply to be entertainment for the onlookers. He is the only black person, male or female, described in this space, and he enters and exits at a prescribed time. His place in the gymnasium and the freedom of motion he is allowed differ quite drastically from that of the ball players.

The young "mascot" in Bacon's story is not an extraordinary character type, but instead one that recurs in the genre to reify whiteness. In *Jane Allen of the Sub Team*, for example, the sophomore team uses an unsettling depiction of a Native American man as their mascot:

> At the same moment a full-fledged Indian chief burst into view…In his belt was an enormous purple tomahawk, of the proportions of a battle-axe, while dangling carelessly from his shoulder was a string of what perilously resembled five scalps. He carried a huge purple and white banner and waved it as he walked, with the air of a conqueror (301).

As soon as he exits the court, Bancroft writes that "To Jane Allen, as she stood ready for action, it was the supreme moment of her life.…she was at last a part of that which she had so often vainly dreamed" (*Sub-Team* 302). When racialized mascots are brought onto the playing field, their status as non-citizens bestows subjecthood onto the white women in that same space. In Jennifer Guiliano's history of college mascots, she notes that the

spectacle of the mascot during games "expressed a multitude of complicated ways of envisioning community that relied on historical tropes of raced, classed, and gendered bodies and narratives of conquest familiar to the general public" (10). Both the young black boy and the "chief" promote racial stereotypes, and their only entry into this athletic space comes because they embody or exaggerate those. Then they are dismissed and the white student body proceeds with its "democratic" game, feeling as though they are collectively part of an innately American community.

When mascots are not in use to set the white student body apart from the racial Other, egalitarianism in the gym is proven to be a façade through the rhetoric that students use. One convention within the college genre is the recurring use of chants during sports games. In *Jane Allen of the Sub Team*, for example, a popular chant goes as follows:

> Today thy valor show,
> The ball to basket throw,
> *Whitewash* the haughty foe (301, emphasis mine).

While the term "whitewash" can refer to beating an opponent, its most common definition has to do with lightening or covering something in whiteness. In these chants using "whitewash" as a term is a particularly striking choice because it serves both meanings. The students want the team to whitewash, or beat, their opponents, but there is also the subtle suggestion that the gym space should erase or make invisible any markers of race. Similarly, in Gallaher's "The Clan" one of the women offhandedly refers to herself as a slave. Lydia tells her peers that she is busy with school and has little time for extracurriculars. They say that "[t]ime was made for slaves" and she declares, "I am a

slave" (212). It is right after this declaration that her fellow students "ceased to trouble about her" (212). Throughout the story, Lydia is singled out as a student who does not enter the basketball space or have an athletic community of her own to speak of. Gallaher describes the girls with whom Lydia is friendly but notes that "she had never really belonged to [this clan]" (*Vassar* 213). While there is no indication that Lydia is not white, marking herself a slave through language seems to be enough to prevent her entrance into athletic spaces.

National Assimilation and Its Limits

Throughout the *Jane Allen* series, when white, European women enter the narrative, the College Girl novel lays out a narrow path for them to follow to achieve Americanness, typically through athletic involvement. The characters who understand the performative dance of athletic and racial identity fare best in assimilating. For instance, Adrienne Dupree, a French dancer who becomes good friends with Jane, attempts to align herself with Americanness upon first meeting our heroine. At this point in the novel Adrienne is the most different from the other characters by virtue of her Europeanness. She is described at several points as "purely French" and identified as the "stranger" (*Sub Team* 113). In what seems to be an effort to establish her sameness to the college girls upon meeting them, Adrienne mentions her governess, "Blacky," several times (*Sub-Team* 114). These otherwise unnecessary asides clearly work to establish a shared whiteness, or to at least make it clear that while Adrienne may be French, there is still somebody more Other than herself. This move succeeds because soon after Adrienne mentions her governess, the other girls ask, "You are from New York City, are you not….Judging from appearance, Adrienne Dupree was a spoiled darling of luxury" (*Sub*

Team 114). Adrienne, already coded as white, is now linked to an American nationality. It is worth noting, too, that she has been brought up in "the atmosphere of the theater," and "had learned to read human nature with surprising accuracy" (*Sub Team* 114). Adrienne is a performer who understands how to shape her own identity to fit in, and perhaps not coincidentally, her basketball skills rival her dance talents.

Similarly, Helka Podesky, a Polish scholarship student who Jane often imagines as a "light…aristocratic Pole," "a real little primitive," and "a pre-war aristo," adopts the Americanized name Helen "Nell" Powderly and then occupies a space in the gymnasium (*Center* 17, 59). Like Adrienne, Helka is a performer who grew up on the stage and has an inherent understanding of identity performance. Once she adopts a name that aligns her with white Americanness she is acknowledged as a "good sport" (*Center* 117). Having entered the "sacred confines of the gym" and "winning the first goal at initiation," Helen was "thereafter to be known as Nell [and] found herself in unsought favor" (*Center* 116, 118). Erasing any sort of difference from her white, American peers was the thing that allowed Helka to remain in the sacred gym space, participate in the events, and find the acceptance of the other students.

Other marginalized characters get little acknowledgement of their humanity and they certainly are not fleshed out as nuanced, multi-dimensional characters. They are reduced to their racial and ethnic identities and largely kept out of any sort of sports arena unless invited in by or linked to an athletic, white woman. The limits of national assimilation become clearer with the racialized depiction of Dolorez Vincez, a Latina character whose indeterminate "darkness" is posed as threatening. The characters in *Jane Allen* whose performances fail or are revealed to be artificial are also the non-white

characters who are dispelled from the basketball court. Dolorez, the "villain" of *Jane Allen, Center* (1920) is the best illustration of the conjoining of nativism and athletics. When she is first introduced in the narrative, Dolores is called a "foreigner" and identified as "the South American girl" (184-85). In fact, she is identified by her darker features and South American heritage throughout most of the novel, typically in derogatory ways. Bancroft constantly emphasizes her dark-colored eyes and the "ill-natured lines of her Latin features" (276). There is no question that she is racially Other, particularly as she is always described standing next to the light-featured Marian Seaton. Dolorez makes the alternate basketball team, and rather quickly Bancroft alerts the reader that she is not to be trusted. Even Marion Seaton, the antagonist through much of the series, questions Dolorez and tells her that if they are to beat Jane Allen's team, they must do so fairly and in the open. Here, Marian exemplifies the democratic values that basketball instilled in her, as it trained her how to be an ideal woman-citizen. In response, Dolorez "smiles the queer smile that even Marian did not relish," and her "black eyes flashed dangerously, and betrayed more animus than might be safely dealt out in basketball" (*Center* 185-86). This rejoinder underscores how far from that citizen ideal, or any sort of national assimilation, she is.

The emphasis on her dark features serves to alert the reader that this woman, who is distinctly Other, is not to be trusted. In fact, these dark features become bodily inscriptions of her poor character and dishonor (Salazar 163). Her identity remains ambiguous and her "queer" smile suggests that perhaps Dolorez is familiar with attempting to avoid categorization. The other students question Dolorez's age and basketball skills in the following chapters, noting that she looks older than them and has

impressive athletic skills, deducing that she is secretly a professional player. Sara Ahmed's theorization on the racialization of space is helpful to thinking about Dolorez's Othering here. She says that "racial others become associated with the 'other side of the world'. They come to *embody a distance.* This embodiment of distance is what makes whiteness 'proximate' as the 'starting point' for orientation" ("Mixed Orientations" 97-98). Dolorez embodies a distance; she represents what is "over there," which becomes that much starker when she occupies the "here," the white-coded gymnasium.

During the action of the big game between the first and second teams, Dolorez commits two fouls and is removed from the court, signaling that anybody who is Other may only occupy that athletic space conditionally, and not on their own terms. Her fouls also signal to the other women in the gymnasium that Latinas are "naturally" cunning and incapable of sportsmanship—a moral shortcoming. She is kicked off the team and unable to remain in the gym space. Soon after, it is revealed that Dolorez has been disguised as a Wellington student, but is in fact a former physical education teacher, explaining her strong basketball skills. We also learn that "Dolorez' hair had undergone the operation of a change from black to yellow, and back again via peroxide R.R." to escape recognition, and to pass as a younger basketball player. Once her performance as an athletic college girl is discovered, it is noted that Dolorez "[reverts] to type," suggesting once again that athletic performances are not fully obtainable for marginalized characters (*Center* 231). Dolorez's fouls seem no worse in severity than Marian Seaton's attempts to rig the tryouts and bribe the judges who oversaw them. Yet, Marian is forgiven and allowed to remain on the team. Dolorez's real fault, on the other hand, seems to be her attempt to change her appearance and perform a role. Her athletic skills are not in question and fouls

are part of the game—it was not uncommon for basketball to get very rough at times, even in *Jane Allen*. However, her racial masquerade cannot stand. Not only did she mask her appearances, but she lied about her age to gain access to the basketball court. Dolorez is depicted as duplicitous and connected to an immorality that College Girl novels suggest is the antithesis of the athletic space.

Dolorez's ultimate expulsion from the basketball court makes clear the perception that honor is not something that the racialized Other can have. In light of Dolorez's indiscretions, Mrs. Weatherbee explains that she is not only expelled from Wellington, but is disqualified from all amateur sports in the future. There is no sort of forgiveness bestowed upon Dolorez or any attempt to explain her bad behaviors, as happens with every middle-class, white woman in the series who does wrong. Contrast this expulsion with Jane's embrace of Marian Seaton at the end of *Jane Allen, Center* after Marian repents for three years of mischief-making. Where Dolorez is cast out, Marian "join[s] the circle" of friends at the novel's end (309). Dolorez is certainly not a perfect character and she makes poor choices, but she is the only character who is not extended second and third and fourth chances to make amends and learn the error of her ways. Instead, she is quickly written off as a villainous South American woman. She is expelled from the gymnasium and eventually from Wellington altogether, much to everybody's ignorance. Bancroft writes that "the fate of Dolorez was of little interest. She might be outside the big gate in the shabby cottage banging around…for all anyone within the gates knew or cared" (*Center* 292). There is a clear delineation of space here. Dolorez is relegated to the other side of the college gates, literally outside the university, separated from those "within the gates." Neither the court nor the campus is as egalitarian as a space as it is

said to be. Instead, both only function as such for white women who have assimilated into Americanness in these stories.

Conclusion

By the 1920s, the landscape of women's athletics had drastically changed from what it was several decades prior. The professionalization of sport was quickly becoming a reality, female athletes were being taken more seriously than they had been in prior decades, and women's athletic bodies were not simply scorned and derided—at least not all the time. World War I also served as a significant turning point in the sporting landscape. As series like *Jane Allen* and *Grace Harlowe* exemplify, women ceased to participate in athletics as frequently when the seriousness of the World War began to resonate through universities and campuses. They diverted energy from the basketball court to reform movements instead. Bancroft describes this shift, writing, "Even basketball had lost some of its power to enthuse…for as juniors in a second extension year [Jane and Judith] felt a little too grown up to go themselves generally into the big games" (*Junior* 192). During the last two years of school, if Jane participates in basketball, it is as a referee—upholding fairness in that space—not as a participating player. Jane still participates in other sports, like golf, and maintains her athleticism—though the reader never gets vivid descriptions of that athletic participation like she does for the basketball matches; where basketball had once been her all-consuming passion, though, social service takes its place. For Jane, her Social Service course "was like living in an outside world and sleeping in college, so intense was the interest in the human problem offered through their field work" (*Senior* 210). Even the titles of the novels reflect that shift—the first three were all named for basketball positions, while the final

two are simply called *Jane Allen, Junior* and *Jane Allen, Senior*. The post-war anxieties and priorities in the United States during this time period began to seep into literature and reshape athletic female characters.

Even college landscapes began to shift; many of the women's colleges opened their doors to men in the post-war period, which altered the dynamics and attitudes towards female athletics on campuses. Horowitz describes this shift, writing that "Students turned the energy that had once gone inward into the college community into college organizations, teas, and athletics southward toward men. Female collegians did not cease to have friends or to run for student government, but their sense of the location of college's central drama shifted" (284-85). This is not to say that athleticism is erased from narratives when women choose to marry as it once was in domestic fiction of the mid-nineteenth century. While nearly all of our athletic heroines do marry by the end of their college journeys, they still retain their athleticism. When they choose to step off the basketball court, it is *their* decision to do so in order to do more good for the community as a whole. Partners and romantic relationships do not dictate that choice, nor do they sap our heroines of their athleticism. After WWI ends, for example, Grace Harlowe is a married woman who separates from her husband, Tom, for a summer while she and her other female friends partake in physically challenging horseback riding adventures across the West. They are still happily married but each pursues their own interests and endeavors for a period of time. Elfreda Briggs asks Grace what Tom must think of the "really desperate journey we are about to undertake — the journey across the desert that lies just beyond the Cactus Range you can see over yonder" (*Overland Riders* 10). To this Grace tells Elfreda simply that Tom "listened to reason" (12). Post-war literature is

not suddenly a utopic landscape for athletic female characters, but readers can hear the resonance of incremental shifts in attitudes towards sportswomen. It takes much longer, though, for a shift in racial prejudices to occur. White women may not be completely sapped of their athleticism if they find themselves in domestic situations, but their narratives still include troubling racial markers.

When the athletic woman first began to emerge as a consistent character type in 1840s writing, she was part of a counter-public—boxing prostitutes whose movement through public spaces was contingent on the reception of her masculine, yet sexualized body, in print culture. As the nineteenth century progressed, athletic women continued to appear in literature in steady numbers, blurring the lines between athleticism and performance. Some authors attempted to discipline the performing female body, evacuating her of her athleticism or punishing her for refusing to be still and conform to feminine conventions; nevertheless, the athletic woman's inclusion in literature opened a space for the acknowledgment of that body in motion and in transition. Female athletes began to mold their own identities, establishing in the process that their bodies could be read in multiple ways, and using that multiplicity to their advantage. They became code switchers, moving across social registers by adjusting their bodily comportment and conversation about sport. Athletics provided women an agency that they otherwise did not possess and the privilege of movement.

By the 1920s, the athletic woman had become a mechanism for enfranchisement, a training ground for the ideal woman-citizen. But, that enfranchisement came at the expense of women of color. Where athletic involvement was once used to align women with blackness, as the flash press did with boxing prostitutes, it is intertwined with white

Americanness by the twentieth century. The shifting alignment of athletic activities with middle-and-upper class women by the twentieth century help to account for this change. Where physical exertion was once often considered something for lower classes to engage in, it is seen as a more privileged activity by World War I. The way the authors depict athletes of color in early-twentieth-century literature brings Zora Neale Hurtson to mind. In "How It Feels to be Colored Me" she writes, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (154). By the time the College Girl novel becomes popular, non-white characters are thrown against the stark whiteness of athletic spaces, like gymnasiums, in order to highlight their difference. They bestow subjecthood on the white participants and onlookers at athletic events.

Athletic women have come a long way since the 1840s; yet, women's sports today are still political, still hampered with inequalities and limits. Athletic white women became a mechanism for enfranchisement by the beginning of the twentieth century, but even today, women of color struggle to find acceptance through sport. Claudia Rankine's extended meditation on Serena Williams in *Citizen* describes the athletic world's reaction to the tennis star and illustrates the ways the national belonging through athletics still eludes women of color. Rankine recounts the 2011 U.S. Open final, played on September 11, writing that some "speculate Serena especially wants to win this Grand Slam because it is the tenth anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers. It is believed that by winning she will prove her red-blooded American patriotism and will once and for all become beloved by the tennis world" (31). Serena, a woman born and raised in the United States, who has represented her country at three different Olympic games, must still prove her patriotism and that she is deserving of national acceptance. Similarly, Venus Williams

lost her 2012 U.S. Open match a year after being diagnosed with Sjogren's syndrome and was met with "shouts of 'Let's go, Venus!'" To these shouts she replied "'I know this is not proper tennis etiquette, but this is the first time I've ever played here that the crowd has been behind me like that. Today I felt American, you know, for the first time at the U.S. Open'" (Rankine 31). Venus is certainly aware of the importance of that embrace to her own sense of belonging and Americanness. Athletic participation is a powerful tool for female enfranchisement, but in the United States it is still happening at the expense of women of color.

Athletic women in literature matter. They are not merely minor characters and their athleticism is not inconsequential. They are characters who refuse to be still. They have a kinetic energy that moves them across the pages of fiction, across geographic spaces, and across cultural boundaries that other women did not have the means to navigate. Their movement forces other characters to respond to them and the space they occupy—sometimes positively, sometimes derogatorily. Their movement attunes us to attitudes towards race and gender in the nineteenth century, and how science, literature, and politics helped to shape those attitudes. And the ways that athletic women are written about historically shape how we respond to athletes and athletic bodies today. As Claudia Rankine writes, "the body has memory" (28). Studying the athletic body and the literature in which it is portrayed in the long nineteenth century helps us to make sense of female athleticism today.

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